

LIBRETTO “Ruth and Naomi”
an opera in two acts
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ACT I

ACT I, Scene 1 *the present, Ruth's apartment in NY*

Naomi: Ruth.

Ruth: Dearest Naomi.

Both: It's so hard to believe it's been a year.

Ruth: Your son, my husband.

Naomi: My son.

Both: Beloved. An eternity, and as if yesterday. Grief is a piercing physical pain. I'll never get used to it.

Naomi: Today I miss my own husband all the more keenly. And you must miss your own parents all the more today.

Both: So much loss in our lives.

Naomi: Here is the yartzheit candle. O blessed art thou our God, king of the universe, who hath commanded us to light the candle of remembrance. Amen.

Ruth: Amen. The prayer is beautiful. It is good you have your faith to sustain you.

Naomi: Though you don't believe.

Ruth: But I believe in you. Respect for the traditions came from love and respect for you.

Both: Love and respect. You're such a comfort to me.

Naomi: Which makes it so hard to tell you what I must do now. I must return to my homeland.

Ruth: To Israel? That's no problem, I will go with you.

Naomi: No, I should go alone, and you should give the things in your life—your friends, your work—a chance to sustain you.

Ruth: Grief isolates me from the rest of my life. I'd rather be with you. We share our grief, we love each other.

Naomi: I know.

Both: I feel closer to you than anyone else in the world.

Naomi: But--

Ruth: You don't want me to come with you?

Naomi: I don't really want to leave you, but I feel I must return. While you find out what life has to offer you.

Ruth: What life has to offer me is with you.

Naomi: But Ruth, you wouldn't like it there. It's very sexist.

Ruth: That's nothing new.

Naomi: I mean, very very very sexist. Men were in charge, it didn't bother me then. Also it's very primitive.

Ruth: Israel is hardly an undeveloped country.

Naomi: Ruth, for you I will try to explain. But you'll never believe me.

Ruth: Try me.

Naomi: Mel's father Eli and I didn't come here from modern Israel. We came from Bethlehem, in a land called Canaan, three thousand years ago.

Ruth: What?!! Dearest Naomi, are you alright?

Naomi: We used to wonder if we were out of our minds. Here in New York, we still remembered Canaan. There was a time of great famine. We left, thinking we were going to a land nearby. Next thing we knew, we're in New York and it's 1979.

Ruth: You're not talking sense! This is so unlike you.

Naomi: Why would I make this up? We struggled to understand. What were we doing here? Was the hand of God at work? Nothing happened that amounted to a mission. Maybe it was a mistake? But the God we knew didn't make mistakes.

Ruth: This is all impossible!

Naomi: But it's true. When we found ourselves here, we somehow knew how to function. We instantly had an apartment, the one I still live in. I was a teacher and Eli an accountant. Life here felt very familiar and also totally strange. We prayed and prayed to return to Canaan. Our prayers went unanswered. Then we had Mel, and all our prayers were for the future.

Ruth: Mel believed this?!

Naomi: We never told him. Ruth, do you believe me?

Ruth: No. I'm sorry. But what matters most is it's true for you.

Naomi: Hardly a ringing endorsement.

Ruth: What you claim is intriguing though. Perceiving the fourth dimension!

Naomi: Only God can do that.

Both: How I love your company.

Naomi: But, if I can, I must leave you.

Ruth: Stay here with me.

Naomi: I don't even know if I can return, since I never could before.

Ruth: If against all reason what you say is true, anywhere you go, I will go with you.

ACT I, Scene 2 circa 1100 BCE, ancient Bethlehem

Naomi: We're entering Bethlehem.

Ruth: This is incredible! Unbelievable!

Naomi: How I yearned to be here again.

Ruth: Those hills, these robes. Those buildings of white stone, nestled gleaming in the sun. How did you get us here? Magic? Faith?

Naomi: I simply reversed the way we went before.

Sara and Miriam: Such lovely weather. Pleased be God to make it last---

Ruth: She never could bring herself back here before. Something---

Sara and Miriam: ---throughout the harvest.

Ruth: ---worked this time. Or am I dreaming?

Naomi: Oh Good Lord, it's Sara! Miriam! Sara! Miriam!

Miriam: Who is that?

Sara and Miriam: Lord, can it be? She looks like Naomi.

Naomi: I am Naomi!

Sara and Miriam: Welcome back! Welcome back!

Ruth: I understand their language— and I'm speaking it too!

Sara and Miriam: Where were you?

Naomi: I was in Moab.

Ruth: Moab???

Sara: We survived the famine.

Miriam: As she can see.

Naomi, Sara, Miriam: Thanks be to God!

Ruth: Oh no! My wedding ring is gone. How can that be? Where did it go? It must be too modern to fit in here.

Sara and Miriam: How did you fare in Moab?

Naomi: So much woe. I lost my husband, lost my son. I would be as bitter as seder herbs, but for the love of my daughter-in-law. Ruth, come join us. My daughter-in-law, my daughter.

Sara and Miriam: Welcome to Bethlehem!

Ruth: Thank you.

Sara and Miriam: Such comfort she must bring to you.

Naomi: For her sake I tried to dissuade her from coming. She spoke the most beautiful words--the most beautiful words I've ever heard.

Ruth and Naomi: Whither thou goest, I will go with thee.

All: Whither thou goest, I will go with thee.

ACT I, Scene 3 just afterwards, Naomi's dwelling

Ruth: That was quite a cover story.

Naomi: I don't understand. What is a cover story?

Ruth: You know, a story you tell to hide the truth.

Naomi: Ruth! Don't you know me? You've never said a mean thing to me--but now you call me a liar.

Ruth: Dearest Naomi, please forgive me. I just meant you saying Moab instead of New York.

Naomi: What is New York? I never heard of it.

Ruth: It's where we lived, don't you remember?

Naomi: No! Don't you remember? We lived in Moab, we worked the land—

Ruth: No!

Naomi: You don't remember Moab?

Ruth: You don't remember New York?

Both: You don't remember New York/Moab! How can this be?

Naomi: Your hands are so soft. How strange. The roughness from working in the fields must have smoothed out during our trek from Moab.

Ruth: The place you're confusing with New York.

Naomi: No!

Ruth: Could you think you're the Naomi in the Bible?

Naomi: Dearest Ruth, please don't talk crazy.

Ruth: I'm not crazy!

Naomi: Nor am I!

Both: *Ruth:* New York! *Naomi:* Moab!

Both: We can't both be right. You must be wrong! This is terrible!

Ruth: Maybe I shouldn't have come.

Naomi: That would be worse. I understand, it was your grief speaking. That happened to me after Elimelach died. Sometimes I didn't understand my own words either.

Ruth: You're still the same you! It wasn't a mistake to come here.

Both: I'm just so glad to be with you!

Ruth: Since you say I've worked the land before, should I do the same thing here?

Naomi: Yes, if you don't mind, so we will have food. I would help, but my body's grown too old.

Ruth: Don't you worry, I will take care of us. You do look older than when we left New York.

Naomi: Ruth, you mustn't speak of this New York you imagine. People will think you're odd.

ACT I, Scene 4 *a few minutes later, field, workers harvesting grain.*

Tenor and Bass: Pulling, cutting, pulling, cutting.

Soprano and Alto: Follow, follow, bending, lifting

Ruth: Those bundles look heavy. I hope I can do this. To help Naomi, who cannot remember New York, yet somehow remembers Mel and me.

Men: Pulling, cutting

Women: Bending, lifting.

Women: Follow, follow, bending, lifting.

Men: Pulling, cutting, pulling, cutting.

Ruth: May I work here beside you?

Alto: You are welcome to. Who are you?

Soprano: Yes, who are you?

Ruth: My name is Ruth.

Soprano: Never heard that name before!

Alto: Where do you come from?

Soprano: Well?

Ruth: I came from Moab.

Soprano: Why did you leave?

Ruth: I came here to Bethlehem with my mother-in-law Naomi.

Soprano: You are married?

Soprano and Alto: We are all maidens here.

Ruth: I was married, but my husband died.

Soprano: So now you come to us, to find yourself another husband.

Ruth: I'm here for food to sustain Naomi. Please don't begrudge me that.

Alto: Let her be.

Soprano: Come join us at our work.

Ruth: Thank you for your kindness.

Ruth: I won't mention it. I don't want to distress you. Now I'll go to work, just point me in the right direction.

Amazing—I seem to know just what to do. Like Eli and Naomi in New York.

Tenor: "Who's this?"

Bass: How strange she looks!"

Tenor: Skin as bland as sand!

Bass: Take her by the hand!

Ruth: Please cut that out! I mean no harm, and you should mean no harm to me.

Tenor: Listen to her—talking back.

Bass: That's no way for a maiden to act.

Soprano and Alto: Here comes Boaz. This is his field, the largest one.

Bass: Boaz, look at this stranger.

Tenor: She talked back!

Boaz: What is going on here?

Bass: She barged in on us.

Tenor: Trying to get food for someone named Naomi.

Boaz: Naomi and I are kin. I hear she's returned from Moab, with her late son's wife. Is that you? Are you Ruth?

Ruth: I am Ruth.

Boaz: Then look no further for work. You are welcome in my fields. And I'll tell the men not to bother you. And to leave some grain for you, ample for you and Naomi. And I'll give you both a goat.

Ruth: I thank you so much.

Boaz: It's I who thank you. Word has spread all over Bethlehem, how much you've meant to Naomi. Caring for her since her son, your husband, died. Leaving behind you all that was familiar and dear. Come, let's all get back to work.

All men: Pulling, cutting, pulling, cutting.

All women: Follow, follow, bending, lifting.

ACT I, Scene 5 *several days later, Naomi's dwelling visiting*

Sara: Everybody talks about her.

Naomi: Why?

Miriam: Because she's so different.

Naomi: Different?!

Sara: Please, don't get huffy.

Sara and Miriam: We're just concerned.

Naomi: And just what concerns you?

Sara and Miriam: What will become of her?

Naomi: Sometimes I think that too.

Naomi, Sara and Miriam: What will become of her?

Sara and Miriam: She really should remarry.

Naomi: I don't disagree with you. But she's never mentioned anything like that.

Miriam: Surely she knows that's what happens.

Naomi: As you say, she's different.

Sara and Miriam: You must convince her. We will help you.

Sara: What will happen when she grows old?

Miriam: And you get even older?

Naomi: Stop this! Here she comes.

Ruth: Hello, Miriam. Hello, Sara.

Naomi: Look at you, you're all aglow.

Sara and Miriam: Something's up?

Ruth: We finished today, the barley harvest and the wheat harvest too. And then such a celebration—singing, dancing in the fields.

Naomi: It's so good to see you happy.

Ruth: I did have a good time. I enjoyed dancing with the women. I enjoy working besides them. Still - - -

Naomi: What's happened to your smile?

Ruth: It's dimming, isn't it?

Naomi, Sara, and Miriam: Yes, it is.

Ruth: I can't forget the difference between us.

Sara: What is that?

Miriam: It's obvious. They're all unmarried.

Ruth: Yes, I'm the only young widow out there.

Sara: The young married women are busy raising families.

Miriam: And working in their husband's fields, if they have any.

Ruth: I understand that.

Sara and Miriam: You don't have to be different. You could remarry.

Ruth: What? Remarry? I have no wish to remarry. I'm fine as is. I enjoy working in the fields. My hands still get blisters but my muscles have stopped complaining. It makes me calm and peaceful.

Sara: Field work's good for you now but soon you'll age.

Miriam: It's time to think about the next stage.

Naomi: You deserve some rest.

Ruth: Don't tell me you agree with them!

Naomi: Ruth, I'm an old woman, so I must be dependent on you. But I don't want to burden you.

Ruth: I keep telling you, you're not a burden to me.

Miriam: But if you married again, she would have no worries.

Naomi: Enough about me. What about Ruth?

Ruth: Ruth doesn't have a problem!

Sara and Miriam: Ruth needs to marry and have children.

Ruth: No I don't.

Sara and Miriam: We are organized by families.

Ruth: Naomi's all the family I need.

Miriam: Not the same thing.

Sara and Miriam: Husband! Children! God hath ordained it.

Naomi: God hath ordained it.

Ruth: You too, Naomi?

Sara and Miriam: Well, Naomi?

Naomi: Ruth, the truth is I do agree with them.

Ruth: I can't believe you of all people would think that. I'm married to Mel, in my heart and in memory.

Naomi: I know. And I love you.

Sara and Miriam: Husband! Children!

Sara: So who should she marry?

Miriam: It's obvious. Ruth should marry Boaz.

Sara: Yes. *Ruth:* No no no no! *Miriam:* Yes.

Sara and Miriam: He and Naomi are kin. He assumes an obligation to marry a widow in his family.

Ruth: Please! Stop this! I have no wish to remarry. I have a high regard for Boaz, he's been most generous and kind. But no one should marry out of obligation.

Sara and Miriam: My dear, it happens all the time.

Ruth: How much clearer can I be? I don't want to marry anybody!

Miriam: You must! *Sara and Miriam:* You must!

Miriam: Here's what should happen. With the harvest done, Boaz will be sleeping on the threshing room floor. You should go to him tonight.

Ruth: No!

Sara and Miriam: Why does she resist?

Ruth: Approach him in the middle of the night? What if he attacks me? What if he rapes me?

Naomi: Boaz wouldn't.

Miriam: You said yourself you have a high regard for him.

Ruth: Not like this! He'll think I'm offering myself to him.

Naomi: Not if he's the man I know him to be.

Ruth: What about the woman you know me to be?

Naomi: I know you'll do what you must, to secure the future.

Ruth: Naomi, you can't be serious.

Sara and Miriam: She is.

Naomi: Quiet, you two. Dearest Ruth, please say yes.

Ruth: I can't.

Naomi: You must. Ruth, I'm begging you.

Ruth: I can't refuse you, I'll go. But as they say, nothing good will come of this

ACT II

ACT II Scene 1 *that night, the threshing room*

Boaz: What? Is someone there?

Ruth: It's Ruth.

Boaz: Ruth! Is something wrong?

Ruth: No.

Boaz: Then what are you doing here?

Ruth: Naomi urged me to come to you, because you are a kinsman.

Boaz: Ah! Now I understand. Come sit down here.

Ruth: No.

Boaz: Have no fear. It was brave of you to come. Naomi cares about your future. And I will fulfill my obligation. We will marry.

Ruth: Boaz, I am honored. But I can't accept your offer. I am still in love with my husband.

Boaz: Now I don't understand. You're saying no?

Ruth: I'm saying no.

Boaz: That's unheard of! Women don't say no.

Ruth: I can't say yes.

Boaz: Then why did you come to me in the first place?

Ruth: I couldn't refuse Naomi.

Boaz: So you refuse me instead?

Ruth: I don't mean to offend you.

Boaz: You are very strange. But you can't mourn forever. That is not our way. People marry for convenience---

Ruth: What about love?

Ruth: What about love? What about love?

Boaz: ---or for property, or security. Often by family arrangements.

Ruth: You haven't married.

Boaz: I am fortunate in property. And until you there's never been a widow connected to my family.

Ruth: You can keep waiting for love.

Boaz: For love? Perhaps. Perhaps I've been waiting for you.

Ruth: Oh no, I didn't mean me.

Boaz: Perhaps you'll have a change of heart.

Ruth: I'm sorry, but—

Boaz: Say no more. Should your heart change, please do tell me. If not, we'll never speak of this again.

Ruth: Should my heart change, I will tell you.

Both: Ruth: Should my heart change, I will tell you.

Boaz: Should your heart change, you will tell me.

ACT II Scene 2 *two days later, in and near Naomi's dwelling*

Ruth: There's nothing to tell.

Naomi: For two days now that's all you say, whenever I ask you what happened.

Ruth: Because there's nothing to tell.

Naomi: You chirp like a bird, the same song over and over.

Both: Ruth: There's nothing to tell. *Naomi:* "--nothing to tell."

Naomi: I know, I know. Wait—Are you sparing me your burden? Did he abuse you?

Ruth: No, you were right about that.

Naomi: Good. And he still gives us grain.

Both: So our lives remain the same.

Ruth: And while you grind the grain, I'm off to the well to get water.

Ruth: I like this primitive life. It roots me to the earth. Along with grief there's also ground. I don't miss my old life, I just miss Mel. People here work all day long and talk talk talk. Work and talk and pray pray pray. The way they see it, God's not just an act of faith, God is a fact of life. It's easy to keep my promise to Naomi not to talk about the future.

Boaz enters: Ruth! Something very strange has happened. A traveler from Moab stayed here last night. He remembers Naomi, and her husband too.

Ruth: Naomi really was from Moab? Could I have been there too?

Boaz: You pretend you don't know?

Ruth: That can't be possible.

Boaz: He says he never heard of you. What's more, he said Naomi had no son.

Ruth: What?!!

Boaz: He said that the couple was barren.

Ruth: That explains it! That's why we're here. But still-

Boaz: Explain!

Ruth: Please give me a minute to figure this out. One. Naomi was somehow in New York and Moab at once.

Boaz: New York? I never heard of it.

Ruth: Two. But she only remembers Moab.

Boaz: You better explain!

Ruth: Three. She remembers me and Mel, she thinks we were in Moab.

Both: But we/you were never there.

Boaz: Where do you come from?

Ruth: So we're not from her past, we're from her future!

Boaz: Nonsense! Nonsense!

Ruth: Therefore, time runs second to the bonds of family. Isn't that wonderful!

Boaz: Why do you rejoice? This is a very serious matter. And I should have noticed sooner, those blisters on your fingers. You've never worked in the fields before.

Ruth: No.

Boaz: He also said there's never been a woman there as pale as you. So why do you pretend to be from Moab?

Ruth: It's true I'm not from Moab.

Boaz: That's obvious. And why does Naomi go along with this deception?

Ruth: It's very hard to explain. But no deception was intended.

Boaz: Try very hard to explain. Or all of Bethlehem will turn against you. And turn suspicious of Naomi.

Ruth: That would be terrible. I can't let that happen to Naomi. Boaz, I would love to tell you the truth. In fact it would be a huge relief to me. But you'll never believe me.

Boaz: Nothing could be worse than the suspicion I feel toward you now. To think, I thought you an honorable woman.

Ruth: Sorry to disappoint you. But my main concern is Naomi. She really thinks she had a son in Moab, and that he married me there.

Boaz: You insult Naomi. You make her sound deranged.

Ruth: No, no. What she believes is true. Except it didn't happen in Moab.

Boaz: Where then?

Ruth: This is the part you'll never believe. Naomi and I came from thousands of miles and years away. When Naomi and her husband went away from here, they found themselves in the future.

Boaz: It's you who are deranged. I must talk to Naomi.

Ruth: She doesn't know. She doesn't remember.

Boaz: Naomi, I must speak with you.

Naomi: Of course. How nice to see the two of you together.

Ruth: Boaz and I have been talking.

Boaz: Ruth and I have been talking.

Naomi: This is good.

Ruth and Boaz: Not really.

Ruth: About where we lived before we returned to Bethlehem.

Boaz: About where you lived before you returned to Bethlehem.

Naomi: Do you mean Moab or New York?

Ruth and Boaz:

Ruth: You do remember New York!

Boaz: What is this place called New York?

Ruth: Boaz, that's what I tried to tell you. A city in the future!

Boaz: That can't be true! You lie! You lie!

Naomi: Ruth doesn't lie, and neither do I. So it must be true. It must be God's doing.

Boaz: Naomi, that is blasphemy. You join with Ruth in trying to deceive me, and you claim God's power to support your lies. I'm through with both of you.

Naomi: This isn't good.

Ruth: But I'm so glad you remember New York.

Naomi: In truth I don't. But I remembered what you said. So I mentioned it. Did I do something wrong?

Ruth: Not at all.

Naomi: But the way things stand with Boaz is terrible. You must go after him, take it all back. You must apologize.

Ruth: I can't take back the truth. And what lie would I put in its place?

Naomi: God only knows. I pray God help you. Hurry, go after him.

ACT II Scene 3 *immediately afterwards.*

Ruth: Boaz, I implore you, don't turn your back on Naomi.

Boaz: She joined you in your mockery.

Ruth: I confused her. She meant no harm. And with me gone, there's only you to provide for her.

Boaz: So, you'll be leaving. Going back to wherever it is you came from.

Ruth: I don't know how to get there. I wish I could stay with Naomi. But having so deeply offended you, I have no choice but to go away. I don't know where. Perhaps I'll just wander, until the land no longer sustains me. I beg you take care of Naomi.

Boaz: What is that? On your hand? On your finger?

Ruth: It's back!

Boaz: It just appeared---

Ruth: It's back!

Boaz: --out of nowhere!

Ruth: My wedding ring is back!

Boaz: Let me look at it.

Ruth: Since the day we married, I've never taken it off. But here!

Boaz: Where did it come from? How did it get here?

Ruth: I have no idea. Not that you'll believe me, but I haven't seen it since the future.

Ruth: I have no idea. Not that you'll believe me, but I haven't seen it since the future.

Boaz: "In the future, in the future."

Ruth: Yes, in the future.

Boaz: You lie! You lie!

Ruth: I speak the truth.

Boaz: You just tell lies!

Ruth: The truth! The truth!

Boaz: Lies!

Boaz: Goodbye.

Ruth: Return my ring!

Boaz: Here's your ring back. It means a lot to you. Here. I thank you for letting me see it up close. And please forgive me for accusing you of deception.

Ruth: You no longer scoff. Was it the ring?

Boaz: The ring, plus you. Steadfast. Sincere. Resigned. I believe you.

Ruth: I'm so relieved.

Boaz: Relieved? That is all?

Ruth: Boaz, I'm elated it.

Both: *Ruth:* Elated! *Boaz:* And so am I!

Boaz: Bringing you back from the future—it must be God's doing.

Both: Just what Naomi said.

Boaz: What is the future like?

Ruth: It's very different from here.

Boaz: Wait. Say no more. I shouldn't want to know. Unless that's why God sent you here.

Ruth: I don't think so. Ever since you said Naomi and Eli were barren in Moab — because I knew she did have a son, in another time and place -- (maybe through better nutrition, who knows) —I've known since you told me that what I was doing here. I'm here to make a story come to pass. A story to be retold through the ages. This story requires that Naomi have a son, who marries a woman named Ruth. But he dies. Then the women go to Bethlehem, back where Naomi was born.

Boaz: This story sounds very familiar.

Ruth: Yes. Naomi wants Ruth to marry a good man named Boaz. But I would not, could not marry.

Boaz: Because of your love for your husband.

Ruth: Yes. Until just now when you told me you believe me and my heart changed.

Boaz: So the story comes true.

Ruth: Yes. I'm here to marry you.

Both: We will marry.

Ruth: I hope you understand that Mel is always in my heart.

Boaz: I understand and I respect that.

Both: We will marry.

Ruth: And though I'm from another place and time, your ways shall be my ways.

Boaz: And we won't tell a soul about the future.

Ruth: And if we have a son, let's name him Obed.

Boaz: That must be his name *Both:* in the story.

ACT II Scene 4 *about 18 years later, Naomi's dwelling*

Ruth: Dearest Naomi.

Boaz: How is the pain?

Naomi: It comes and goes. And then comes back again.

Ruth and Boaz: We have good news to make you feel a little better. Obed's wife just had her baby.

Ruth: You're a great-grandmother!

Naomi: How good of God to let me live long enough to see this day. And let me die in peace.

Ruth and Boaz: We pray you don't leave us just yet.

Naomi: It may be soon. Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh. What is happening?

Ruth: How can we help you?

Naomi: The child—is it a boy?

Boaz: Yes, our first grandson.

Naomi: And is he healthy?

Ruth: Yes, all goes well.

Naomi: Good. Oh. Oh. Oh. Now I know what's happening. Now I see it all. They must name the baby Jesse.

Ruth and Boaz: They will. Any name you want.

Naomi: Good. Everything falls into place. Ruth, I remember New York. I remember—Ruth, I can't see.

Ruth: I'm right here. Hold my hand.

Naomi: And Boaz?

Boaz: I'm here too.

Naomi: Dear Boaz, your great-grandson will reunite our people. For Boaz begat Obed--

Ruth and Naomi: --and Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David.

Naomi: O blessed be thou our God, the king-----

Naomi dies.

Ruth and Boaz: This happiest of days now also is the saddest. This happiest of days now also is the saddest.

ACT II Scene 5 *present day, immediately after end of opening scene, Ruth's New York apartment.*

Ruth: I'm home! Mel, I'm home! Mel? Mel, I had a nightmare you were dead! Mel, where are you? You must be out.

Oh no. The yartzheit candle. You really did die. The yartzheit candle—the flame's just where it was.

Naomi! Naomi? The life we had in Bethlehem must all have been a dream. Did it all go by in a nanosecond? With so much detail? It felt so real. But it couldn't have happened. But Naomi isn't here. In my dream Naomi died. But that can't be. She was right here. I'll try her phone.

Just as I feared. "The number you called is no longer in service. And there's no new listing." Dear Naomi, you really did die. Did you really die in Bethlehem, three thousand years ago? Did time

here stand still, while I was living in the past? Did I perceive in four dimensions? I know that's impossible. But it's the only explanation. I'll let myself believe, time does run second to the bonds of family.

Now I am alone. I miss Naomi, I miss Mel, I miss my real or imagined Bethlehem family. If I really did go back there, why do I find myself now back here, all alone? Is there something new here, something I didn't see before now?

Yes. Now I see. Love and grief impinge on time and memory. Mel, our love's been so entwined with grief. But now the strands are loosening. Because death runs second to love. Death runs second to love.