Ruth

**By Greg Moore**

**Summary:** The Biblical story of Ruth, but set in modern times.

**Style**: Dramatic. **Duration**: 15-20min

**Actors**: 5M, 5F

**Characters**:

**MAYLIN** Son of Texas ranchers, Limleck and Naomi

**RUTH** Maylin’s's wife. Native of Mexico (Biblical MOAB)

**ORPAH** Ruth's sister-in-law, widow of Chilion (Maylin's brother, only mentioned)

**NAOMI** Widow of Limleck, mother of Maylin.

**LIMLECK** Naomi's deceased husband, father-in-law of Ruth.

**ELIZA** Woman of Bethlehem, old friend of Naomi

**VERA** Woman of Bethlehem, another of Naomi's friends

**BOAZ** Very wealthy Bethlehemite, an older single man, second cousin\* to Limleck

**BEN** Boaz' foreman, directing the harvest.

**KINSMAN** Well-to-do relative of Boaz, first cousin to Limleck.

\* Bible says "relative, or kinsman", so I just chose a relation arbitrarily.

**Author’s Note:**

When I was a child, I thought as a child, so while I read some of the Bible, I did not read the book of Ruth, because it was named after a girl. As a young adult, I heard a beautiful song, "Entreat Me Not to Leave Thee", and I looked at the four little chapters tucked away between the depressing close of Judges and the fresh start of Samuel, but they looked to me like a theological soap opera, all about lineages and ancient customs and something about a "kinsman-redeemer."

Jesus was already Son of God and Son of Man! How could you get a better kinsman and redeemer than that? But recently, I read it with new eyes. There has been so much turmoil in the world about walls and immigration and how we label people, even unconsciously, as "the other." I like to think of myself as unprejudiced; yet I get creepy feelings when I see tattoos on people, these "others."

Ruth grew up in Moab, which is across the Dead Sea from Israel – strictly foreign territory. The book is more than a reason to show how this "other" woman came to be one of the ancestors of King David of Israel – and therefore, a direct grandcestor of Jesus Christ himself. In the odd little love story of Ruth we learn, through the surprising lives of real people, and unexpected and courageous decisions, what it means to be truly accepted into God's family.

Ruth is short enough to make a drama about 15 to 20 minutes long, without missing any of the substance. I have chosen to set it in the modern era, around 1920 or 30. There really is a Bethlehem, Texas, about 200 miles east of Dallas, in the middle of nowhere. Moab is turned into Nogales, on the Arizona border.

The Cast consists of five women and four men. Most of them are mature or older adults, but Ruth and Orpah should appear younger than the rest, being of marriageable age.

**Script**

**SCENE 1 – at home in Nogales, Mexico, around 1920. Scene out of Steinbeck.**

*MAYLIN, Ruth's husband, is sick in bed, Ruth & Naomi by his side, sharing memories.*

MAYLIN Here's a picture of our big ranch back in Bethlehem, Texas. You know, when I get over this fever I want to take you back there. We grew acres and acres of barley, and good grapes for wine.

RUTH There's your dad. Limleck – such a funny name! I miss him.

ORPAH Me, too. He was so kind.

MAYLIN He took us all four of us down here, when we were starving... We had to [cough] start all over in life – and we did it! [ Uhhhooh... ]

NAOMI Don't overdo it, son. Maybe you should sleep a little.

MAYLIN I'll sleep that fever off, and be fit as a fiddle by morning – there's a good harvest out there. Good harvest right here in Nogales. It would be awful to starve with a field of ripe grain, waving in the breeze... just outside... [ cough ] the window...

NAOMI Please, son, just try to get some rest. God will take care of us.

RUTH Now Maylin, don't be like your brother, who worked himself to death.

ORPAH Mom, what's wrong?

NAOMI Son?

RUTH Maylin? Maylin! ...  *[ silence ]* Mom, he's not breathing.

**SCENE 2 (same)**

NAOMI I am leaving this place and going back to the ranch up in Bethlehem. It's two hours east of Dallas, and the bus runs there every day. Best thing for you girls is to stay put. You've got family right here, and, well... there's lots of nice young men – men, as in future husbands - working the fields. Maybe they don't go to church like we do, but they are good people, and you are one of them. You are family. You'll be more comfortable with how they do things.

ORPAH Tell me - what is *Bethlehem* like?

NAOMI Bethelehem? [ chuckles ] It's not even a city, just a scattering of houses, gas station... school. Few hundred people, I guess. They know me, but they've never seen you... I mean, seen your face.

ORPAH What difference does that make?

NAOMI Life can be rough for an outsider. I am an outsider here; you are an outsider, there. I have bought a one-way bus ticket for me, and arranged for you to stay with your aunt Martha, right here in Nogales. She's got an extra bedroom. Kiss me goodbye! Let's wish each other a happy life, and prosperity. Just be sure to write me about your new husbands and children, and grandchildren!

ORPAH Good-bye, mother. I love you.

RUTH Don't ask me to leave you, mother – and if I follow, don't make me turn back. I have made my decision. I am going *with you,* no matter what. Your people will become my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. It would be worse than death if anything but death separates me from you. Besides, I figured out what you were going to do, and I also bought a bus ticket. One way!

**SCENE 3 - in Bethlehem, Texas**

NAOMI Here we are! Bethlehem, Texas, at sunrise.

Not quite as exciting as Dallas, but this little town will grow on you.

*[ shift focus to two Bethlehemites, ELIZA and VERA ]*

ELIZA Vera, that woman coming off the bus looks familiar. Is that Naomi?

VERA Only one way to be sure... *[ calls out ]* Naomi?

NAOMI Yes? Who's calling me Nao – VERA! How good to see you!

ELIZA You are looking wonderful!

NAOMI But please don't call me Naomi any more.

VERA That's your name – what else should I call you?

NAOMI Call me Mara. Naomi means pleasant, Mara means bitter... and that is how God has treated me, bitterly. I left here empty, and He has brought me back home, empty. How pleasant is that?

ELIZA You left during a famine.

NAOMI Now I have a famine in my own household. My husband and both my boys have died, and I am too old to start looking again.

VERA Well, Mara - who is this fine young lady with you?

NAOMI I'm sorry – I forgot to introduce Ruth. She's my daughter-in-law – she married Maylin, who died last week. She is so sweet – I don't know why she clings to this bitter old woman.

VERA A good meal might be nice to take the edge off that bitterness.

NAOMI Later, if you don't mind. I could use to see my cousin Boaz – about the ranch.

ELIZA Well! Boaz is out in the cornfields, taking in the harvest. If you stay a little ways back of the combine, they'll be glad to let you have any ears that they missed. They're good like that, and you won't have to be afraid of them.

 *[ embarrassed pause ]*

What I mean is – Ruth, you are very good-looking, and there *are* men in this town that consider a cornfield a good place for whatever they feel like doing, if you know what I mean.

RUTH I am more hungry than afraid. Show me the way.

**SCENE 4 – in the Field**

BOAZ The Lord be with you!

BEN (REAPER) The Lord bless you, Boaz!

BOAZ Say, Ben, who is that señorita?

BEN Her name is Ruth. She came back with your cousin Naomi from Nogales. Other side of the Rio Grande. She asked me if she could follow along and pick up any ears that we missed. She's been doing this since dawn, and only rested a little at the house. Don't think she's had lunch yet.

BOAZ So *that's* Ruth. *[ approaches RUTH ]* Miss – young lady? Keep gleaning in this field – I'm glad for your help. Don't stray away from us. I have told my men not to molest you or mistreat you in any way. And they will get water from the well, just for you. Just ask!

RUTH What did I do to deserve this? I am nothing more than a –

BOAZ Ruth.

RUTH How did you know my name?

BOAZ I have learned the whole story, from Naomi losing her husband and sons, to your leaving your own mother and father to come here to us strangers up North. May God bless you in full for doing this. Yes - the real God, who shelters refugees under His great eagle's wings. Maybe you don't understand – I'm sorta talkin' poetry.

RUTH You have spoken to my heart. Though I haven't even been hired on as a fieldworker, I want to please you with my good work.

BOAZ Before you think of picking up one more bushel basket – it's lunch time.

*[ blows a whistle ]* Lunch time, everybody! *[ to RUTH ]* We'll get back to work, maybe a couple of hours.

**SCENE 5 (same, but at table)**

BOAZ Here's how we always start our meals. You break off a piece from the big loaf of bread, and dip it in the wine.

RUTH (tastes) Oh! Lovely, but . . . it's got a *kick* to it!

BOAZ It's a sour wine, made from barley, and mixed with oil. It's actually beer, but it does quite well for wine. You've never tasted it, have you?

RUTH Can't say so. Whew!

BOAZ We're not set up for a banquet, much as I would like to have one! We'll have to settle for a bowl or two of – would you believe it – barley nuggets, parched to perfection. Grape nuts, some people call them, because they go so well with wine.

RUTH These are good – really... uh... *[ smiles ]*  crunchy!

**SCENE 6 – Field**

BOAZ Ben, I want you to kind of do a lousy job with that combine. I want that young lady, Ruth, to find so many ears she will need a wheelbarrow. In fact, get her that wheelbarrow over by the tool shed.

**SCENE 7 – Naomi's room**

NAOMI Well, how did harvest go?

RUTH Would you believe two wheelbarrows, overflowing?

NAOMI Gracious! You could start your own business!

 Seriously... let's talk about Boaz. You know, he's your third cousin. Boaz and I go way back.

RUTH You mean, like a kinsman? He could take the place of Limleck?

NAOMI [ laughs ] Oh, Ruth! I do think he's kinda cute, but... he's more like a kid brother to me. It's obvious that he has eyes only for you.

RUTH ME?

NAOMI C'mon, girl. You saw him out there, sun glistenin' off those big arms. Surrounded by every single girl in town. But his first glance at you – a deer in the headlights. He will be working the thrashing machine all night. He guards it like it's his baby. Sleeps by it. Walk softly, and use your noodle.

**SCENE 8 – At the Thrasher**

BOAZ THAT was a nice meal. Time for some shut-eye. Morning will be here too soon.

 zzz – ZZzzz – zzz...

RUTH [ sneaks in, lifts a corner of the blanket, uncovering his feet ]

 [ lies down, her back against his feet ]

*[ time passes ]*

BOAZ [sensing some disturbance, anxious] What was that? Who are YOU?

*[ Ruth turns around, and he recognizes her ]*

RUTH I am Ruth, your servant. But YOU are my next of kin. [ holds up a corner of the blanket ] Spread your wing of protection over me.

BOAZ God has blessed you, young lady. Ruth, you have given me something special. Instead of chasing after the young men, you have chosen me!

RUTH Is this all right, sir?

BOAZ There is nothing to fear. I will supply whatever you need. Everyone here has seen what a brave and capable, strong woman you are.

RUTH Thank you, sir.

BOAZ But – I am not your nearest kinsman. There is one that is nearer. I will have to let him decide for us. Hm... already, I am putting a plan together in my mind. No one should know that you were here tonight. Alright?

RUTH I will leave while it is still too dark to recognize a face.

BOAZ One other thing. Don't go back empty-handed to Naomi. Hold out your scarf. One, two, three, four, five.. six. Six measures of barley.

**SCENE 9 – At Naomi's**

NAOMI Sit *still*, child. Wait and see how this works out. I know Boaz. He will not rest until he finishes the matter – today!

**SCENE 10 – At the Town Square (a bench)**

BOAZ Hey, Jake! Fancy meeting you here!

KINSMAN Hi, Boaz. What's with the City Council? You've got ten men with you.

BOAZ Well, you came by at exactly the right time. I've got a deal for you, a business deal. It's big. I need witnesses. Naomi has come back from Nogales.

KINSMAN And...?

BOAZ Remember, she is Limleck's widow! She has put the ranch in hock. It's for sale now – thought you might be interested.

KINSMAN Good piece a'land. Sure, I'll redeem it!

BOAZ Just one detail. Naomi's sons both died while they were in Nogales. But Maylin picked up a wife over there, name of Ruth.

KINSMAN The one from Nogales? Migrant field worker? Wish I had a few more migrant workers as purty as that one.

BOAZ *[ like a sales pitch ]* Oh, that's the best part. She's from Nogales, sure - but has sworn never to leave Naomi. So she comes with the ranch. Nice woman, Beautiful. *Lonely.* Chance of a lifetime.

KINSMAN Whoa. Whooooa. A deal like that would complicate the heck out of my own inheritance. I would have to use part of my own estate just to buy that ranch, and suppose she has children? Suppose she has ten kids! My children would lose two-thirds of what they are expecting from me.

BOAZ But if you don't do it, you are not just depriving a widow of a good husband, you are ending Limleck's *and* Maylin's bloodline, wiping their memory - their family name - off the map.

KINSMAN Can't do it. Ruth is sweet, but she's an an outsider. Just can't do it. Why don't you buy the place yourself?

BOAZ All right, then! *[ stands up, addresses invisible council ]* Men of Bethlehem! I have an announcement. Jake Kinsman has refused to buy the Limleck place.

[ elsewhere on stage ]

VERA Ruth, did you hear that?

RUTH Jake Kinsman doesn't want to buy my father-in-law's ranch. So?

ELIZA If he bought the ranch, the ranch includes YOU. You would get a free husband. Rich husband. Huh! Jake Kinsman must think he's too good for you.

VERA Time to stand up for your rights.

RUTH What rights?

VERA It's the law. Sacred law, straight from the Bible. Says you're supposed to walk up to him and pull off one of his shoes, and spit in his face, and say, "This is what's good for the man who doesn't build up his brother's house." Everybody in Bethlehem is here, they all see it, and Jake Kinsman's name is mud for as long as he lives, and serves him right.

RUTH You expect me... to expectorate?

BOAZ *[intervening ]*  Oh, forget the whole ceremony. The shoe will do.

KINSMAN Here we go, Cinderella. For your prince. *[with a magnificent sweep, he offers the shoe*

*to Ruth, who quickly hands it to Boaz. Ruth wrinkles her nose. ]*

BOAZ Most of you know Naomi, who was Limleck's widow. I am buying her ranch, along with anything that belonged to her sons. One of her sons had a widow named Ruth, so she is part of the deal, and I am happy with the deal. I will marry Ruth, so that Limleck's family will continue to prosper, and grow.

**SCENE 11 – At the Ranch**

RUTH Boaz... why the stinky old shoe?

BOAZ Ruth, we have an odd little custom around here. When you have the right to something, and give up that right to someone else, you take off one shoe and give it to the other person. Well, you and me - we are cousins somewhere down the line, and in these parts the closest cousin gets first shot at buying a widow's property.

RUTH So being an outsider put YOU on the inside track. You - are a genius!

*[they embrace]*

**SCENE 12 – Ruth & Naomi (a year later)**

RUTH Mom – I'm so glad for everything! And you are such a good Grandmom. And isn't little Obed the loveliest boy you have ever seen? Remember - Vera and Eliza gave him that name. Obed. Servant. I want him to grow up to serve God in everything he does.

NAOMI How could I have ever called myself bitter? I am Naomi again. So pleased. Thanks be to God!

**NARRATOR**

*[quoting from Ruth]* "...and Obed became the father of Jesse; and Jesse, the father of David [who became king of Israel]."

*[ quoting from Matthew]* "...and to David was born Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah the Hittite; and to Solomon was born Rehoboam; and... let's skip about 25 generations to... Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born. Jesus of Nazareth, our kinsman, our redeemer, who did not refuse any of us. Thanks be to God!

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