

## Identity Shift

Normally, I am Ruth  
I know the limitations of my position as a woman in this society  
I know that there are things we are not supposed to do  
I know the risks of being loud  
of being a woman who speaks up  
and faces judgement  
who is not silenced

Normally, I am Ruth  
I call people into God's truth  
I am excited to teach  
to advocate  
to shed light  
because it is necessary  
I know what I can do  
what I have been called to do  
what I must do

Normally, I am Ruth  
I speak up for myself  
and my sisters and my people  
I see a future  
that I can make brighter

But today, I am Naomi  
No  
I am Mara  
I am empty and lost and  
bitter

I am bitter because  
it's not right that women are limited  
It's not right that I have to speak out like this  
have to teach others  
out of my pain  
about my pain  
It's not right that I have to be aware  
of all the ways I can be perceived  
have to be palatable  
lest people shut my words out and  
dismiss me as

Emotional

Radical

Feminist

Because as a woman of color, I cannot rest when  
my people are being killed and raped and blamed

Today, I am Mara

because after reading so many stories about men  
I want to read stories about women  
and be empowered and feel joy

And yet

every time I open a book about someone like me  
they are being killed and raped and blamed  
because that is our reality

I am Mara because

it is not right that this is our story  
that this is the story we are given

I am Mara because

I was taught that Ruth is a love story  
This is not a love story  
Instability and privilege are not romantic  
I'm finding it hard to move onto the redemption  
when there is so much injustice  
so much pain

I am Mara because

centuries later  
the story has not changed

I am Mara because

men are not told to be Boaz  
but I am told to be Ruth  
and they do not mean be bold  
they mean be a good  
daughter-in-law  
wife  
mother  
They mean  
be okay with sacrifice  
in the name of love  
but they only say it  
to the women

They mean  
be okay with what you get

I realize I am Mara  
Because I look at Ruth now  
and do not see her courage  
I see the box placed around her that forced her  
onto the threshing floor and  
put her at the mercy of a man

I am Mara because  
I am tired  
I am sorrow  
I am grief

I was once Naomi  
I saw God's work all around me  
My life full of His blessings  
Joy used to be easy

I want to be Naomi  
I want to say that I was full  
and then empty  
and then full again  
That the Lord brought my emptiness to fullness  
that I rediscovered delight  
that life tastes sweet  
that there are faithful people  
who will help and protect and use their power and privilege

Who will help and protect and use their power and privilege?

I want to be Naomi  
But there's a heaviness that I cannot name  
that is unfamiliar and strange  
I don't know how to do this

I don't know how to be Naomi anymore

God of Justice and Healing  
help me to sit with my grief  
I know that you grieve too

This was not what you intended  
You created us equal  
This was never the story you wanted us to have  
God of Restoration  
would you redeem this world  
Would you take this  
mountain weight and ocean tears  
Give me rest  
Crown me with strength  
Come like Hope again

Ruth, chapter four, verses fourteen to fifteen

*Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him."*

I am reminded that Naomi still sees God's goodness  
even in her grief and bitterness  
She calls upon His blessings  
and was blessed by others in His name

I look to the community of women  
who saw Naomi  
and did not let her stay Mara  
but called her by her true name  
who honoured Ruth  
as a daughter worth more than seven sons  
Radically countercultural

I am reminded that God  
Honoured Tamar  
Honoured Rahab  
Honoured Ruth  
Honoured Mary  
Women in vulnerable positions  
who had courage and faith  
He included them in His plan through the lineage of Jesus  
God knows them as not only women of worth but  
Worthy

I am  
Ruth

Mara  
Naomi

God calls me  
Worthy