

Ruth, Noomi and Orpa

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Translation: Christine Piston

A blue, a red and a green piece of cloth. Orpa - blue; Ruth - red; Noomi - green Each woman steps forward when it is her turn to speak.

ORPA: I am going back.
RUTH: I am not. There is nothing to keep me here any more. Nothing.
NOOMI: There is nothing to keep me here any more. Nothing.
ORPA: I am going back.
NOOMI: I am going back.
RUTH: I am going forward. I shall try something new.
NOOMI: I shall begin again at the beginning.
ORPA: I shall pick up the threads where I left off.

NOOMI

I am setting out - once again! It is not the first time that I am leaving familiar surroundings. Familiar? With time I settled down, I tried to understand the foreign ways and customs, adjusted myself to them. Nevertheless I have often felt like a stranger. Once again, my thoughts stray to bygone times. After years of hard work I was dreaming to grow old with my husband by my side and surrounded by a swarm of grandchildren. Deep in my heart, I still feel the grief of all these buried hopes. But at the same time it is the grief that keeps me going. I do not want to stay where death forcefully ended all my plans, hopes and dreams. Once again I want to make a new start, I want to stop thinking about the past, I want to let it go. My way leads me back to where I grew up, back to my native country. My native land. Will it receive me again in its bosom? I am full of longing, and at the same time I know that quite a few things will have changed there as well. And I, too, am no longer the one who went from home all these years ago. I am no longer the carefree young girl I once was. No. Returning home will be an experienced and mature woman with her very own history of happiness and grief. A woman who knows about alleged constraints, conventions, and rigid structures. One who has learnt that it is fear pure and simple that is behind the numbness and the unwillingness to change; it is the fear to lose influence, power and control. Now I want to begin again at the beginning. I want to find out if my very own mixture out of adjustment and resistance is able to sustain me. However I also know that my strength is limited. I am no longer as carefree as I was in my youth and I have lost the zest I used to have as a girl. Therefore I am very glad about the young woman who is going back with me. We need each other and we respect each other. That makes us stick together.

RUTH

There is no other way. I have to leave. I need to take this step, I want to go to this foreign land. I shall try something new, thus escaping the lethargy and numbness of my present situation. I am still young and full of life. I do not want things to continue the way they always have in the place where I grew up. For I have changed. When my husband died, I knew: Nothing will ever be the same again. I did not make up my mind in a hurry. No, I have thought twice. There is nothing left to make me stay. With all my heart, I wish for a new beginning. I am very happy that there is someone in my life, a woman, who means a lot to me. Basically my setting out is her doing. I am sure that without her I would not have seen my destination so clearly. We shall go together - to the place she left as a young woman. She is older than I am, more experienced and more advanced in wisdom. I am roused by her determination and the single-mindedness with which she follows her path. She keeps on encouraging me to figure out who I am and what I want, to find out what my way is. I know it will not be easy. We will have to fight for our daily bread. It is very likely that I must agree to compromise in this new country, too. However, I am absolutely determined to remain mistress of my actions and I will not give up my independence.

ORPA

hat a farewell! We parted by degrees. The decision was taken step-by-step. I felt completely torn. I had nearly reached the point where I meant to go with them. After all, we have been very close. Although it is painful, I now see my path clearly. I am going back. It is not for me to run away, not now. Right now it is important to me to keep in touch with my own roots. There are still a lot of things in my life that I need to sort out. Perhaps I do not know yet quite know what has shaped me and what my objective in life is. My short marriage has covered up the need to seek answers to these questions, but now there is no avoiding them any longer. I feel so utterly thrown back upon myself that I need the protection of a familiar surrounding. For me, setting out means finding my roots again. I will go back to my family, back to my culture, back to my spiritual roots. It is very likely that I shall discover treasures I have passed by until now without noticing them. The women by my side are leaving. I shall miss them very much. But I shall find new - old companions.

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 RUTH: I am not. There is nothing to keep me here any more. Nothing.
 NOOMI: There is nothing to keep me here any more. Nothing.
 ORPA: I am going back.
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 RUTH: I am going forward. I shall try something new.
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When the dialogue is finished, the women remain on their respective coloured cloth.

The biblical story

The book Ruth tells the story of a man who left Bethlehem in Judah because of a famine and went to live in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. The man died there, his sons married Orpa and Ruth, two women of Moab. After they had dwelled in Moab for ten years, both sons died as well and Noomi, the widow, was left in the foreign country with her two widowed daughters-in-law. She decided to return to her native land for she had learnt that it gave them bread again. Noomi went forth from the place where she was. About halfway to Judah, she kissed her daughters-in-law and said to them: "Go, return each to her mother's house." The two young women wept and asked her to be allowed to return with her. Noomi argued with them and bade them think again. Then Orpa kissed Noomi and turned back. Ruth stayed with Noomi. "Your sister-in-law is gone back to her people and to her gods", Noomi said, "go and return as well!" "I will not leave you", Ruth answered, "I will stay with you; where you go, I will go and where you dwell, I will dwell. Your people shall be my people, and your God shall be my God. Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried." When Noomi saw that Ruth was steadfastly minded to go with her, she let her come with her. Together they reached Bethlehem where the women recognised Noomi although many years had gone by.

Interpretation

Each of us knows situations where it is no longer possible to avoid making a decision. Each woman has experienced the consequences of small or big, spontaneous or thoroughly considered, deliberate or put-off decisions. And sometimes, in retrospect only, do we notice that a decision we made marked a turning-point in our life. Perhaps decisions made in the past are now confirmed by this Assembly, but they might also be deeply challenged. Every one of us has to find an answer to the question "Which are the threads in my life that I want to take up again? What is my life going to be like after the Assembly? Not all of us will come to the same decision, as we are different. At the same time this diversity may be our strength because each woman does what is good for her. Every one of us follows her own path, and as each of us is on her way, our paths will cross and interweave - for some time or just for a short stretch. Ruth, Orpa, and Noomi - each of the three women has her very own reason for her decision.

Let us listen to them again

RUTH: I am Ruth. At the turning-point I say: For me it is good to leave my old life and to begin something completely new.
 ORPA: I am Orpa. At the turning-point I say: For me it is good to go back and to stay.
 NOOMI: I am Noomi. At the turning-point I say: For me it is good to go, to go back to the place I originally came from.

Three women. Three different decisions. To which woman do I feel the closest now, this morning / this afternoon / this evening / tonight? Which woman and her decision appeal to me most?

Hymn

Blessing

God wants us women to discover the fullness of life.
God is near to us at turning-points and in decisions.
God blesses us as the women we are in our different stations in life.

The women may stand up when the woman they feel closest to is blessed.

Blessing for the Ruth-Women

May God dance with the joy of your youth.
May God spur you on in your courage to set out.
May God encourage you to be creative and to use your imagination.
May God bless the decisions of your life.

Blessing for the Orpa-Women

May God affectionately hold you in his arms.
May God quietly listen to your dreams.
May God enable you to creatively use the knowledge about your roots.
May God bless the decisions of your life.

Blessing for the Noomi-Women

May God bless every year of your life.
May God look at the times of plenty and happiness and at the times of need and suffering.
May God heal your deep wounds.
May God cherish and watch over your hopes and dreams.
May God bless the decisions of your life.