

“Katy Morgan is a richly gifted storyteller. In *The Outsider*, she brings her gifts to bear on what has been called the most beautiful short narrative ever written as she sensitively, faithfully and imaginatively retells the biblical story of Ruth and Naomi. Drawn into the twists and turns of their emotion-packed world, we marvel at God’s faithful care and by the end discover where their story will eventually lead. While written with young people in mind, I suspect *The Outsider* will be read and enjoyed by those of every age!”

SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON, Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic Theology, RTS; Author, *The Whole Christ* and *Faithful God: The Wisdom of God’s Sovereignty in the Book of Ruth*

“A wonderful retelling of a beautiful story. Katy draws us into the drama and helps us feel the tension, fear, loss and despair of Ruth and Naomi—and their rising hope of a redeemer. The Lord’s kindness and sovereign care for his people shines through each chapter, fuelling the reader’s desire to know his love and protection themselves. Younger and older readers alike will be enthralled from start to finish.”

CAROLYN LACEY, Women’s Worker, Woodgreen Evangelical Church, Worcester; Author, *(Extra)Ordinary Hospitality* and *Say the Right Thing*

“Katy Morgan invites readers into the world of Ruth and Naomi, enriching our understanding of God’s unwavering kindness and faithfulness to his people through their story. This engaging retelling of the book of Ruth helps children to understand and connect with God’s word in a fresh and poignant way.”

WHITNEY NEWBY, Founder, Brighter Day Press; Author, *Lift Your Eyes*

THE OUTSIDER



RUTH: A RETELLING

KATY MORGAN

the goodbook
COMPANY

Katy Morgan is the award-winning author of *Songs of a Warrior* and a Senior Editor at The Good Book Company. She likes climbing hills and exploring new places—both in books and in real life! Before Katy joined TGBC, she used to work in a school, and now she teaches the Bible every week to children at her church. She also reads ancient Greek and has a master’s degree in Classics from Cambridge University.

The Outsider

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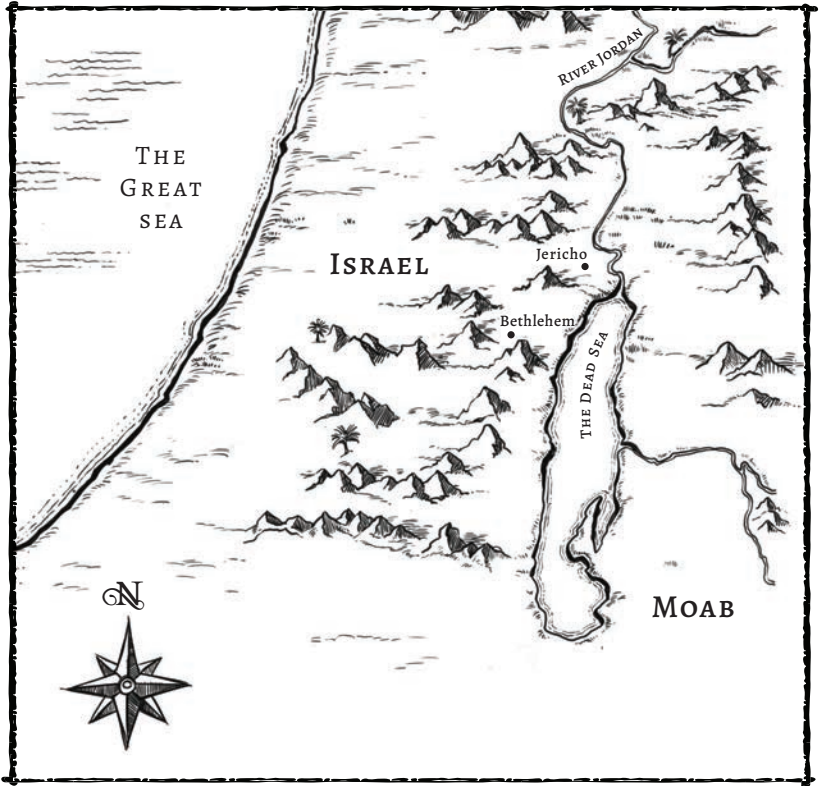
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For Sarah

*Unto you is born this day in the city of David
a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*

THE LAND OF ISRAEL



This map is full of real places because the story you're about to read is based on a true one, found in the book of Ruth in the Old Testament part of the Bible. If at any stage you want to know more about the history that lies behind this book, turn to page 159—there are accompanying notes for each chapter.



CHAPTER 1

The Decision

My mother-in-law's mouth was as wrinkled as a prune. Right then she was pursing her lips, so the deep grooves around them were especially obvious. I think she'd pursed them too many times, and they'd got stuck that way.

Her forehead was furrowed as well. Her eyes were fierce.

"Go home," she said again. "You are *not* coming with me."

But I shook my head. Naomi wasn't going to have her way this time.

I looked back. Orpah was already a dark figure disappearing in the half-grown barley. It was just after dawn, and the light was still low, making my friend's shadow long and black as she walked back towards our village.

My mother-in-law interpreted my backwards glance as hesitation. "Go with her," she said insistently. "Go

back to your own people. Go home.”

But I stood my ground.

I didn't care that Naomi was much older than me. I didn't care that I was supposed to do what she said.

It was for her own good.

I pursed my lips just like her.

“*Don't* urge me to leave you,” I said. “*Don't* urge me to turn back.”

The lines around Naomi's mouth deepened. I put my hand on her arm, wishing I could get across everything I was feeling.

“Where you go,” I said firmly, “I will go.”

I stared at her.

She stared at me.



The day I first saw Naomi was ten years before that—it was the day my third sister was born. I was twelve years old, and I had woken early that morning to find myself being shooed out of the house by my aunts.

“Ruth, get up!” one of them shouted at me. “The baby is coming!”

She was pulling the blankets away from where they'd twisted around my body in sleep. My other aunt forced my hand open and shoved a chunk of bread into it, then yanked me upright. “No place for you here,” she said, flapping at me to tell me to go. “Out!”

I shook my head slowly, still sleepy. "I'm old enough. I should stay with Ma."

"Out, out!" the aunts cried again, in unison this time. "Take your brother with you. Reminah and Amam have already gone."

I looked down at my sisters' empty bed on the ground. Usually we had to pile up the bedrolls and fold the blankets neatly each morning to make space for everything else the room was used for during the day. But now Reminah and Amam's blankets lay in a crumpled heap, just like mine.

Bek, the youngest and the only boy, was crouched in a corner sucking his thumb. His eyes were big as he watched my aunts. I held out my hand, and he grabbed my fingers in his small, slobbery fist.

"Ugh," I said, and swung him up onto my hip instead.

"Out," said the nearest aunt again, but she was distracted this time. Deep groans were coming from the tiny room where my parents slept. The new baby really was on its way.

"Out!" My aunt gave me a little shove and then hurried out of the room.

Obediently, I held Bek tight and headed in the opposite direction.

The sunlight took me by surprise: I blinked and stepped back for a moment, losing my balance and making my brother bang his head on my shoulder. The goat snickered at me from her position tethered to a

tree just outside the house.

I wrinkled my nose back at her. "The joke's on you," I said, sticking my tongue out. *I* was the one who was free to go wherever I wanted for once. I hardly ever got sent out of the house like this without some sort of errand. Nobody would want me back for hours now that my aunts had taken over, and when I really thought about it, I definitely *didn't* want to be around for the birth. But what to do with a day of freedom?

First I had to do something with Bek, who was now getting his slimy fingers all over my hair. I put him down hurriedly. "You need looking after for the day, don't you? Hmm. I know. How about we go and see Dinah?"

"Di," he answered cheerfully. And so on we toddled across the village.

It was a small place, our village. Just a bunch of mud-brick houses scraped together in a loose circle. Our house sat on the top of a low rise of ground from which you could see for miles across the wide, flat plain of Moab. Everything felt fresh and good that morning, now that I'd got used to being awake; the sun was shining, the cold weather was behind us, and the spring rains had made everything green. The houses looked snug and neat in the early sunshine.

Except the house next to ours. That belonged to the widow Zowelah, and it was dirty and crumbling. As Bek and I dawdled past, I noticed that the long cracks

in one of its walls had tiny pink and white flowers growing in them.

“Fla,” said Bek (meaning “flowers”). He reached towards them, but I dragged him away. I was sure those cracks were getting wider.



We found Dinah sitting on a stool in the little courtyard outside her house. She was twisting a fuzz of wool around one end of a long stick, ready to spin it into yarn—but she set it down as I came near and lifted her cheek so that I could kiss her.

“Ma is giving birth right now,” I said. “My aunts are there.”

Dinah nodded. “She’ll be well, then. A strong woman, anyway, your mother.”

Bek was reaching out his chubby hands to be lifted onto her lap. She helped him up. “*Your* arrival didn’t give her much trouble, did it, Bek-boy? So this new baby won’t either.”

I shuddered. Bek’s birth had sounded like quite a lot of trouble to me.

“We must pray that it will be another boy,” Dinah added, nodding towards the shrine that stood in the opposite corner of her courtyard.

“We’ve been praying that every day,” I told her. “*Please, great gods, give us a healthy, strong boy, who will keep the*

family line going and look after our parents in their old age. We've said it every single day."

"Good girl," Dinah smiled. "Now, I suppose you're not welcome at home for a while? I just sent Orpah off to the well, and she has work to do after she comes back. But if you help her for a while, I think I can spare her for the rest of the morning." She raised her eyebrows knowingly. "*And* I can keep Bek with me."

Bek said, "Di," enthusiastically.

So that was that. Soon I was running to find Orpah—Dinah's daughter, and my best friend.

And it was during that morning of freedom that we would first meet Naomi.