** Ruth 3**

It is important to remember that the Book of Ruth existed in an oral form long before it was written down. During that extended oral period, the storytellers would use expressions that would invoke memories of other characters, perhaps from a later period, e.g. King David. They would also use idioms of their particular period. Some of these are still in the written text.

At the end of the second chapter, we heard that Ruth continued gleaning through both the barley and wheat harvests. In chapter three, we find Boaz winnowing his barley. This need not be a step back in time, for it is known that the winnowing can be held back until all of the crops are harvested. So, this chapter is possibly set at the end of the harvest period when the gathers are finished, and the festivities are in full flow.

In the first section, the initiative is taken by Naomi, who persuades Ruth to approach Boaz. Boaz will be sleeping near his grain to protect it from thieves, and Naomi has 'a cunning plan'. Naomi instructs Ruth to wash and anoint herself and put on fresh clothes. A simple instruction but in scripture it also marks a time to end mourning and move on (cf. David after the death of his young son). However, Ruth is not to approach Boaz until he has settled down to sleep. By then, he will be contented through drink, tired from work and alone. Naomi tells Ruth to uncover his feet and lie down. Such actions had, in those days, a sexual connotation. Uncovering his feet or legs was a euphemism for uncovering the genitals. Ruth agrees to all this.

The second section sees Ruth arriving undetected and lying at Boaz's feet. He suddenly wakes up startled and asks this unknown woman at his feet, "Who are you?". When Ruth identifies herself, Boaz welcomes her. Ruth asks Boaz to spread his cloak (or wing in Hebrew - see chapter 2 and God's wing) over her. She may be asking for a cuddle to keep her warm or perhaps more. Ruth's justification for her actions is that Boaz is her kinsman. Boaz points out that while he is her kinsman by marriage, he is not her nearest kinsman, and this opens the way for the development in the final chapter. However, Boaz declares that if need be, he is willing to act as her kinsman. Now "Lie down until the morning." What actually happens that night is left to the imagination of the listener.

Once the story is written down and then enters 'scripture', commentators start to 'clean up' the story concentrating on the virtues of Boaz and Ruth.

"When Boaz urges Ruth to lodge there for the night, he uses the word *lini* (to lodge), a word that has no sexual connotations anywhere in Tanakh. Boaz even purifies the word *shakhav*, employing it to indicate that Ruth should lie until the morning under his chaste protection. In the morning, Boaz uses the suggestive word *yada* to protect Ruth's reputation: "And he said, 'It should not become known that a woman came to the threshing floor"' (3:14).

Nowhere is Boaz’s moral character as evident as in this scene. And yet, Boaz attributes his actions to Ruth's extraordinary character, to her *hesed*. His very ability to understand that Ruth's suggestive appearance is an act of *hesed* is itself extraordinary. Instead of assuming that Ruth has pursued him for her own advantage, or because of her Moabite promiscuity, Boaz recognizes the act of sacrifice that accompanies her bold attempt at seduction. Her act causes Boaz to think more of Ruth, not less." (Yael Ziegler).

At the end of the night, in the pre-dawn light, as Ruth gets up to leave secretly, Boaz gives her more barley. As Ziegler describes it, "I have consistently rendered the word as wrap, implying an unidentified garment that flows over most of Ruth's body. In a strikingly pictorial manner, the filling of Ruth's wrap with barley creates a discernible bulge, suggesting a promise of pregnancy and fullness."

Ruth returns home and tells Naomi everything. Naomi, who was bitter at the end of chapter one, is excited as she predicts that Boaz will sort out the matter of kinship later that day. The listeners are now eagerly looking forward to what is going to happen next.

Source

Ruth, Interpretation a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching by Katherine D. Sakenfeld

Ruth, From Alienation to Monarchy by Yael Ziegler