

Three poems

by [Renee Emerson](#) in the [September 2, 2015](#) issue

Naomi in famine

Ruth 1:1-2

First portions to my husband, then the boys.
I eat what's left behind, grow willowy, more
like a girl than I ever was.

My clothes curtain, I think of cutting
the excess to sell, for what? There's nothing
left in this town, we are the only harvest
to ripen white in the wind.

My husband says sometimes God allows
pain to cause us to move. I pack
our things.

The last cow to calf was three springs past,
and now I boil its bones to make broth.

Naomi's sojourn

Ruth 1:1

The grain fled from our hands.
Harvest brought no yield.
Each day turned to us—empty faces,
empty faces, and our sons' mouths
gaped wider. My fat of childbirth
negotiated to rib, our children's bellies
bloat. I cut the oil by half and by half
til we are eating water, some dirt.
Hunger becomes the greater God;

it gnaws us like a bone. We leave
our home.

Ruth's vow

What they say of you, they say of me, the girls
you were a girl with, the men you did not choose,
I will not choose. I will carry what you carry,
like a child, on my hip that has never born
a child, heavy as a child who will not follow
your voice. Your home built of sorrow will be
my sorrow, the wasp pressed against the inside
of the pane, my pane, the slackening of your skin,
loosened skin around the eyes, will be my loosening,
your hair gone colorless will be my own
lack of color. Your cup of bitter waters is my cup
of bitter waters and together we will drink it,
until the bowl has gone dry as a skull.