

Amid the Alien Corn (2019) for soprano, mezzo-soprano, and piano
Text by E. Louise Beach, Music by Gerald Cohen

Both (as narrators):

In a former time,
in an ancient place,
hardship and famine
wracked the land.
Instead of wheat,
grim thistles thrived.
Corn cockle instead of
barley.

Naomi and her husband
with their two sons
left their home
for they were starving.
Left Judah for the
meadows of Moab.
Over time the sons married
women of Moab.
But then God gathered in
death
both husband and sons.
Beloved men,
but they perished too
young.

Both (as Naomi and Ruth):

This is how things are:
Wives no more.
We wander shoeless
on shards of woe
that cut and prick
and wound and nick.
Old memories stab us
like daggers and darts
that scratch and nip
and notch our hearts.
Old memories of selves
once tendered.

Naomi:

Ruth, widow of my son,
you have become my friend,
my partner,
and my right hand.
My sole companion in grief.

Ruth:

Mother, you mean hearth
and home to me.

With grit and grace,
you lead me
in a season of sorrow.

Both:

Our husbands gone,
we sing a bitter song.
The house of memory
our only home.

Naomi:

Home...Home...
I'm a pitiful widow
marooned in Moab,
and I must go home!
I must leave this place
to seek my native land.
I must leave this place
and return to Judah,
to Judah's newly
wheat-golden fields.

Ruth:

I will go with you to Judah.

Naomi:

No, my daughter.
Do not come with me.

Ruth:

I will go with you to Judah.

Naomi:

No, my darling.
I cannot bear to see
your exile from Moab.
I cannot see you displaced
as I once was!

Ruth:

I will go with you to Judah.
Wherever you go,
I will go.
I will make of Judah my
very own.
Wherever you will journey,
I will follow.
Your people will be my
people,
your God my God,

Naomi (with Ruth):

My heart grown hollow,
is once again filled with
hope.

Ruth (with Naomi):

I'll make of Judah my very
own.
Wherever you will stay, I
will stay.
Wherever you will die, I will
die,
and there will I be buried.

Both:

Nothing but death can
divide us!
Come, sun. Look quietly on.
Our husbands gone,
we sing a kindred song.

Naomi (with Ruth):

Two widows journey to
Bethlehem,
troubling the town
with our bitter affliction.

Ruth (with Naomi):

Two widows journey to
Bethlehem,
stirring the town
with our mutual affection.

Both:

We'll journey back
to a land of bounty,
back to Judah
of newly plenteous bread.

Ruth:

For you, gladly, I will live
amid the alien corn;
I will gather after reapers in
the field.
Your people, my people.
Your God, my God.

Both:

Not even death can divide
us!