

Crossroads

SHIRIN SABRI

Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.

The Book of Ruth, 1:7

They have walked past a swaying
fig, huddled olive trees, past
straggling vines, all the stony
fields of Moab, and at last

draw near to the river's edge,
and a parting of the ways.
They pause and talk, three women
in the dappled light that plays

beneath sparse wind shaken leaves.
The mother speaks, and overhead
a falcon turns in the clouded sky.
One stands, wavers; with her tears shed

retreats. The falcon watches
her shawled figure dwindle, quiver
in the dusty haze, then fade from view
on the long road back. The river

deeps swirl green, the banks are steep,
a branch snaps, wind blown;
the other two wade arm in arm
athwart the stream, to unsought renown.

Held like them, in the falcon's gaze
long ages later, a young man
chooses a road, crosses a stream
before the plains of Mázindarán—
some of his friends balk, turn back. The rest
bleed their lives out into clay
and revive the earth—they die blest;
the last falls like Ruth in rapture

on a joyous wedding day