

The Perfect Name by Ruth Mella

My name is Ruth. Not after a queen or a warrior, but a woman at church—a woman whose story I don't know, yet whose kindness shaped my mother. Mom, just starting a family in a foreign land, often described how this woman seemed to float through the congregation, her presence serene, her voice unwavering. Every Sunday, every Wednesday, she would call my mother "Ruth," the name offered like a benediction, repeated so often it began to root itself within her. Ruth. A name she passed down to me—a name that wasn't hers but felt like it could be.

Proverbs 22:1 lingers in my mind whenever I think of names: "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold." As a child, though, this verse seemed distant, abstract. Ruth felt clunky, an ill-fitting garment among the melodic Kaylas, Jessicas, and Emilys. It wasn't a name for dreams, I thought, but for dusty history books. In elementary school, they called me "Granny Ruth." I'd come home yearning for something modern, something that didn't echo with age. But names, I've come to understand, are like seeds. They root themselves quietly, grow into you...and eventually, you grow into them.

Ruth—friend, companion—a name with roots in loyalty and quiet strength. In the Bible, Ruth follows Naomi to an unknown land, her devotion steady as an ancient oak. "Where you go, I will go," she says, her love not loud but unyielding, a gentle ember that refuses to extinguish. Did my mother name me Ruth hoping I'd inherit this quiet strength? I can't ask the woman at church who inspired her. She's a shadow in family stories, a kind face, a voice that wrapped my mother in something she didn't yet know she needed. Names, I've realized, are as much questions as they are answers.

And I think about the woman who named my mother "Ruth" before I was even born. Her voice, calling out in church, wrapping my mother in an identity she didn't even know she wanted. In a way, that woman gave me a name long before my mother did, passed down like a memory, a blessing, something richer than silver or gold.

As I grew, the way people responded to my name began to shift. "Ruth," they'd say, their faces softening. "My grandmother's name was Ruth. My aunt's. Such a beautiful name." Suddenly, I was a bridge to their memories, holding their hand as they reached back to someone they loved. The name that once weighed me down became lighter, more like a dove than an anchor. It connected me to histories I hadn't lived but could now carry forward.

Sometimes, I think about the act of naming itself—how it shapes what we see, what we hold. A name can be a burden, a tether...or a torch. For years, Ruth felt heavy, dragging behind me like a too-large coat. Now, it settles over me, familiar and warm. When others hear it, their eyes soften, as if it stirs the scent of fresh bread, the sound of lullabies, the touch of a gentle hand. Names like Ruth carry quiet histories wrapped in four simple letters.

Now, when I say my name, I don't shrink. I let it resonate, steady and sure, like the Ruth of scripture. I've come to see my name as more than a label. It's a seed that grew into a story...a

bridge between the past and the present, between strangers and their memories. A good name, I've learned, doesn't need to shine; it only needs to endure.