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