



## Sitting by My Laughing Fire (Ruth Bell Graham)

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Every now and then (and far too rarely) we find a book whose wonder brings unexpected tears (the good kind of tears) to our eyes. Ruth Bell Graham has written such a book.

The poems it contains span almost a half-century of her life. Some are autobiographical; others concern people or situations about which she felt deeply. While not professing to be a “true poet,” she says she has always loved poetry. I have not. But her poems keep teaching me to love poetry (at least *her* poetry). I expect they’ll do the same for you.

It doesn’t matter where I am or who I’m with or how many times I’ve read that poem before; each time I read her poems I’m surprised by how deeply they stir me. I never seem to “get over them” or get enough of them. They always move me to tears, but tears almost of joy. Perhaps that’s why *Sitting by My Laughing Fire* is titled as it is – sometimes we laugh and cry at the same time.

She wrote *With this ring* as she remembers back to her glance at the shiny, unmarred gold wedding band just placed on her finger. She ends her reverie with these words (and I smile as tears blur the page) –

*Could it be that wedding rings  
like other things,  
are lovelier when scarred?*

She wrote *They felt good eyes upon them* for parents of a still-wandering prodigal to help them bear the looks they encounter and the blaming thoughts behind those looks (...*good* parents have *good* children...) She knew of what she wrote – the Graham’s own prodigal son had not yet returned. She ends the poem with these words (and I weep as I read) –

*Remind them gently Lord,  
how You  
have trouble with Your children,  
too.*

She wrote *The field that night* about soldiers who, finding the body of their dead comrade on the battlefield, wondered at the trace of tears in the grime on his face. She ends with these words (and a tear rolls down my face) –

*“The going  
must’ve been tough,”  
they said,  
not knowing,  
that death,  
for a man  
forgiven by God,  
is easy going.*

I’ve given this book to many, and all have loved it. I hope you (and those you give it to) will love it as well.

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