

# Naomi

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Naomi's leathery finger trembled over the enter button. She stared through the smudges of the screen with a soft-focus on the alien numbers that pixelated before her. 9234 0999 4532 8484, 07/24, CVV: 332. These numbers were not her own, and she had never seen them before. Whenever she got to this page, she would call out his name from across the house. Elimelech would shove her out of the way, eyes focused on the dollar total at the bottom of the site. He would bend over the computer like a teacher sneering at a student's work, never taking a seat – and mumble some petty curse about whatever purchase was about to be made. “Far out, Nomes, we can't be spending like this right now.” To him, it didn't matter what it was: activewear, a flight to see her estranged friends, or a physio appointment for her arthritis. In the end, it was all money out of his pocket. There was no point arguing with Elimelech on these matters. She stayed silent.

He had been a handsome devil, once. The sun would shine off his hair like the body of his mustang on the footy field. His smile was notorious at the pub after the game. But a life in the sun had not been kind to him, and running his business had etched its way onto his saggy forehead forever. Elimelech's once endearing daggy-ness had not aged well, and by the end the neighbours would double-take as he limped into their suburban abode.

She had always imagined that Mahlon and Killon would be the ones doing the organising right now. Naomi, the grieving mother, comforted by her strong and successful sons who had mastered the art of awareness and gained the gift of maternal gratitude. But no matter how many books she read to the boys, or how many co-curriculars she would car them around to, they were, at the end of the day, Elimelech's sons. She wasn't surprised when she got the knock on the door from the police that sultry summer evening, and even less surprised when they told her about the vodka bottles found in the wreckage. Alas, no sons to help their grieving mother.

It wasn't long after Elimelech and Naomi met that he asked to marry her. And it was not long after she said yes that he told her how the marriage would be. Naomi didn't mind staying at home, especially when he told her about all the adventures they would have. The fiancés were cruising in Elimelech's poppy red Mustang – God they had some fun in that car – when he told her his plans for the business. It simply made sense for Elimelech to control the money, because, he reasoned, it would be indistinguishable from the businesses' finances. And his pokies funds, Naomi would later find out. She had quipped back about her distinction average in the accounting degree she paused to get married. Biting her tongue, with her lips pursed, Elimelech said for the first – but certainly not the last time in their marriage – “Don't be ridiculous, love.” His eyes were always glued to some far-off object in the distance. She resigned into the soft leather and smiled at the road ahead.

Naomi clutched the arms of the office chair to lift herself up and walk away from the computer. She lit a cigarette – the last in her packet. Even though Elimelech wasn't here to tell her off for smoking inside the house, the ghost of his judgements compelled her onto the unkempt backyard.

Naomi remembered how she and Ruth would sneak off from the family barbeque to enjoy a solitary dart. The mother and daughter-in-law would vent about the cold war of office politics or chuckle at the unspoken flatulence of Elimelech's ancient mother. Naomi enjoyed those moments. Ruth would invite Naomi to yoga with her girlfriends, and the naïve glimmer in Naomi's eyes would betray how badly she craved the solidarity and peace those younger women shared with each other. "Oh Ruth, you know I'm too old for that." Naomi would reply, glancing down at her Birkenstocks. She knew how her husband would laugh at her freshly purchased active wear and question whether she'd ever get up off the yoga mat. Naomi had suffered that humiliation for too long, and instead chose to retreat to the melancholic safety in the quiet echoes of her empty home for the remainder of her days.

Naomi winced as she thought about the vows she performed on their wedding day:

*"Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried."*

Spoken in devotion, promising loyalty and inseparability, these words had manifested and contorted themselves into the melted wax of a once beautiful sculpture. Where he had gone, she had gone. His repayments had become her repayments, and when he died, in the eyes of all that knew her as the wife of Elimelech, she had died.

Naomi's cigarette ashed away and fell into the wind. What would happen if the funeral payment didn't go through? Would they haul his body from the grips of the cremator and deliver it back to their doorstep accompanied with all the letters of overdue bills? What would happen when the bank told her the true extent of their mortgage? She had no immediate family, no safety net, and a gap in her resume that has more years than the HR managers interviewing for the job. There was one place left for her and Naomi wasn't sure she could continue her life without a roof over her head. As quickly as these thoughts drowned her head, she felt a rare buzz from her jeans pocket. It was Ruth. Naomi read the message. At first, she grinned. Then, she smiled through her wonky yellow teeth. Then, she covered her hand over her mouth. And, finally, she wept.

*"Hi sweetheart," the message read, "I am absolutely gutted for you right now and you are in my thoughts completely. You were my rock when Killon died, and I want to be here for you. It must be so stressful right now sorting out everything, and if you need a place to stay you are MORE than welcome at mine and Rosa's place. You'll always be my mother. Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried."*