

## The Truth About Boaz

‘No, Ruth, of course I don’t mean for you to *sleep* with him!’

Those are the exact words Naomi used, I’m certain of it. You’ve asked me the same thing again and again, please believe me! She did send me to him, but not to do what you’re suggesting, I’m sure of it.

Yes, I admit that we started a relationship of that nature very soon afterwards, but he fell in love with me very quickly. It was a natural progression.

I think I replied, ‘What do you want me to do then?’ or something like that. You do things differently in this country, but it seemed strange to me to climb into a man’s bed when he’s asleep, without an invitation.

‘Just be there when he wakes up,’ she said, and I asked, ‘You mean you want me to just wait, in his bed?’ I thought it would be a shock for any man to wake up and find someone in his bed, even a great man like Boaz would be shocked, don’t you think?

‘Just lie there at his feet,’ she said. ‘You’ll be the first thing he sees when he wakes up,’ she said. I asked if she was certain it was the right thing to do, and she said, ‘Trust me. He’ll love it.’ Those were her exact words - *trust me, he’ll love it.*

You don't seem to believe me, but that's how it all started between me and Boaz, my being there when he woke up. And I was right, he was definitely surprised. I'm still not sure women do that here very often, not anymore. Maybe when Naomi was young, though Boaz isn't much younger than her. Anyway, he really didn't act like it was something he knew about, though he was fine with it once he realised I wasn't going to attack him or anything. So, that's how it started.

Obed is my baby's name, and yes, he's six months old, but your question is very personal, you shouldn't ask a woman that.

Why do you keep asking personal things? Look, it's been about fifteen months since I first went to Boaz. I'm sure you can do the maths. But no, that first morning when he found me in his bed we just talked, talked as best we could with my pidgin language skills. Then he gave me breakfast and drove me to the factory.

Right now? My baby is with the nanny, and Naomi is there too. She moved in with us before he was born, so that worked out well. It's the way you do things here, I believe, grandparents living with couples to help with the babies. Boaz is so rich, I can have all the help I want, but Naomi has always been there and she knows me. She mothers me and little Obed.

I can't remember if it was Naomi's idea. Maybe it was my idea. When we were shopping for baby things, for the bath and the crib, I could see her eyes filling with tears

as she fondled the tiny sleep suits. She's been through a lot, you know. We both have. They shot our husbands in front of us.

Because her husband and sons had been wealthy and important foreign diplomats. That didn't sit well with the new regime.

Of course, what other reason could there have been?

They had moved to my country five years before the civil war began, because of her husband's work. He was a diplomat, of sorts. I don't think you understand what their life was like then. Naomi had everything she wanted - servants, luxurious surroundings, glitzy parties. Then, with the uprising, she was lucky not to be executed with the men. Sorry, could you give me a moment, this is difficult to talk about.

No, there was no warning. The rebels forced their way into our home, took our menfolk, even the male servants who were foreigners. They shot them. No trial, no justice, just shot them, there, in front of us.

I don't know why they left us alive. I was a national, but not on the side of their cause. Naomi looked foreign, but we were screaming women, you understand? They just didn't know what to do with us. But we had to get out, how could we live there, two women alone? Naomi has had to start all over again here, back in her own country. She didn't need to bring me, she saved me, I owe her everything. She tells me how lucky I

am to have found a new husband, but I couldn't have done it without her. I couldn't bear to see her so sad. She moved in with us after that, after I saw her crying in the baby shop.

But *husband* is just a word, isn't it, it means nothing. Why are you questioning me about such unimportant details? We're together, that's what matters. Boaz is a man like any other, what can I say? He's not as young as my first husband Mahlon, not as handsome either, losing his hair and gaining a belly. Maybe he doesn't spend much time with me but that's because he works hard. He's always at work, but that's fine. I don't mind.

Do you want me to spell it out? No, there is no marriage certificate. But we *are* a couple. We *are* a family.

Yes, Naomi lives in the house with us, how many times do I need to say it? There's plenty of room and she's more or less a grandparent to Obed anyway, since I was married to her son before, when we lived in my country. She's a good grandmother to Obed. Spoils him, you know, with sweet treats and lots of cuddles. I'd rather he didn't have so many sweet things, really, he's only just started on solid food. But she means well. And babies need lots of cuddles at this age. It'll all be okay. Naomi says that this situation today is only a formality. Just paperwork really. She was really sorry not to be able to come with me. It is merely a formality, isn't it?

He sleeps in a nursery quite near my room. Of course I can see him whenever I want, what a strange question - it's not a prison. Sometimes I go to watch him sleeping just because I miss his scent. Does that sound odd? I just miss that warm milky, breathy smell. And the look he gives me when he wakes up and sees that it's me beside him! His little legs kick against the covers like he's running under there. He's the only blood relation I have now, the only person who is completely mine. Sometimes I nudge him awake, just to get that look from him when he sees me, just to see those little kicks. But the nanny explained that it's best not to waken him, not to get him excited before his next feed. She said that's how mothers do it here. Sometimes I go to feed him and Naomi is already there with a bottle or some baby food. She wants to help, so I don't get tired. And she says it's a good age to wean him off my milk. I don't want to upset her, you know, I need to adapt to how you do it here.

I'm not sure, it was really Naomi who organised things when we arrived two years ago. The people at the border gave me some money and a number to call if I needed more help. But I had Naomi. Because she comes from this country, she knows how it all works. So I never had to call the immigration people. When I arrived, they gave me a room in a flat with some other girls like me, political refugees, widows, women who arrived with nothing. Naomi ended up sharing that room because she had nowhere else to go.

I don't really understand why the government didn't help Naomi. I think her husband was in some sort of secret department, they were off the radar she said. She had to start again, she said.

No, I don't have any money. When we arrived here, they needed somewhere to transfer the funds every month, funds to help till I got a job. Naomi said I should use Mahlon's old account, from before he left. So the government used that account for their payments. I couldn't have my name on the account or the bank card though. Naomi explained that my marriage to Mahlon wouldn't be recognised at the banks here. So we used her name, as his mother. That's how you do it here, in case of problems. It makes sense, really.

It was when I woke up on his feet that we first met, though I had started work in his factory three months before that. I know it was three months before because there were those yellow flowers growing round the factory, and they only grow in March. I'd never seen a flower like that before, the colour looks like God was having fun. It's too bright to be real. They grew round the factory, then they were in bloom round the hospital when I had Obed, and I always thought they must be wild because their colour can't possibly be captured. But they're not wild! Someone planted every single flower.

Boaz is some distant relation of Naomi's husband.

Yes, her husband was killed too, I already told you that, all the men were killed. Right in front of us. Why are you making me talk about this again?

Naomi and I dressed like servants and left immediately.

There was no time to look for papers. But why are you asking, what's more important than seeing your husband shot through the head? They made us watch! Aren't you listening?

We got to the airport and on a flight just before they closed it. Look, could I have some water before we continue? Can we have a break?

Naomi didn't go straight to Boaz when we arrived here, she thought we should try to get work ourselves first. She's very independent. She couldn't work in the factory though, it has to be foreign girls. It's how you do it here, we work harder than your girls, so I've heard people say.

No, the work wasn't particularly nice but it was nice to be with other women my age. The work wasn't bad either though, they didn't mistreat us or anything. I didn't need to work in my country, so it was a big change for me. But if you've lost everything, working on a production line doesn't pose any problems. I know some women have to do really awful things to survive. I've been lucky.

We were making electronic parts for television sets and hearing aids. It doesn't do much for Boaz's image, I suppose - *Hey, I make hearing aids* - but I'm not worried about building up his ego. He has enough ego for an army of men. He owns *Boaz Aids*.

The work was monotonous, but at least I learned a little of your language from the radio shows and the music they played. The first time Boaz took me to a cocktail party - which was far less formal than we used to have in my country - I told someone I made components in his factory. He really didn't like that, he got angry. He said I should shut up until I could speak the language properly. Then he got me a diamond bracelet to apologise. He wanted me to wear it to future cocktail parties, and not mention the factory any more. And I stopped working in the factory around that time.

No, no ring to match. Not yet anyway. I think diamond rings are only given when people get formally married here. We're married in our hearts. That's how Naomi describes it. And Boaz actually! Married in our hearts, just not on paper. Not yet anyway. You're back to the marriage question again. Why? We have a child together!

Obed has Boaz's surname on his birth certificate.

I don't know if mine is also there. I assume it is. I know Naomi signed something, I didn't go with her, it was just a formality and it's easier if you know how it's done here. She also speaks the language, obviously.



I really don't know how much money I got. It just went into the account, along with the money from the government. Anyway, Naomi took care of that, just because it's done differently here. We were still in the flat then.

I stopped working in the factory when I moved in with him. Why are you asking about my work? I haven't worked for months now.

I don't know if there were any special orders from the factory, I just worked on the production line.

No, I don't know how many get shipped overseas, how would I know that? And I never saw any of the components in my country either. I thought I was here to talk about my immigration status in this country? Is the interpreter translating correctly?

Now that you mention it, actually, yes, I may have seen a box of circuits, once, in my father-in-law's study in my country.

We all lived together in my country. He was an important man over there, with the government. He had a huge house and I moved in with them when I married their son, Mahlon.

That day, in his study, I remember the *Boaz Aids* company logo that was on the box. It's quite distinctive, the 'z' is made to look like a snake, but I don't know what was in it. I

don't even know why he had the box - Naomi's husband wouldn't know anything about building televisions or hearing aids.

I didn't go in to look, I wasn't allowed in the study, but it didn't interest me anyway. I had to give formal dinners, introduce my husband and my father-in-law to people in local government. They spoke our language very well, I wasn't needed for that. None of that matters now though, all of that ruling party has been overthrown, totally annihilated.

She's done such a lot for us, yes. Well, she found out about the job at the factory for a start. And she helped me meet Boaz. She's always there for Obed. She's even gone to a few of Boaz's parties as hostess to give me a break.

Do you know how much longer we'll be? I like to be there when Obed is bathed. Naomi helps the nanny, it's her grandmother time. I let her enjoy him. She loves him too, I imagine Obed reminds her of when Mahlon was little. She has bloomed with a new youth, she's come to life with a beauty that was lying below the surface for so long during our troubles.

I don't know why my papers aren't in order. Can you call Naomi? She handled it when I moved from the government flat.

What do you mean? Doesn't she answer?

I don't know! Why don't you believe me?

But I need to go home, it's time for his bath. You have to let me go... his bath!

I don't understand, how can you deport me, this meeting today, it was meant to be a formality? Wasn't it? Just part of the paperwork - Naomi said so. You can't deport me... only me? What about my baby? It's time for his bath!

Of course he's my baby, haven't you been listening? Get your hands off me! Answer me, tell me why!

But he is my baby, he's my Obed! There must be a mistake, when the paperwork is all sorted I'll come back to him. Or I'll send for him! I can come back, can't I? It won't be long, will it? Can you translate that please? It won't be long, will it?

Transcript of the hearing to examine the Boaz Case.

Date: 25th August 2132.

Present: Representatives of Central Government, State 7 of The Second Alliance.

This hearing has been called to review transcripts of interviews involving the woman known as Ruth, at the time of her deportation from our country 110 years ago. Last month, we received official reports that the remains of the woman known as Ruth have been identified amongst others in a mass grave in Zone 3XT-RSP, south-east of Town

Z4, formally known as Rumensville before the civil war in that country which occurred last century. The reports state that testing has flagged these remains as being of particular interest to our President and Town Z4 invites him to take part in DNA testing, to possibly confirm a filial relationship. He has of course refused, suspecting foul play in submitting to a DNA test by a foreign state. This court sees nothing to be gained in proving such a relationship. In order to minimise diplomatic unease, our role today is to review these interviews and to reach conclusions as to the status of the woman known as Ruth, in order to uphold any decisions taken at the time concerning her deportation back to a war zone where her ethnicity would have placed her in a potentially vulnerable situation.

This assembly has read the replies to questions posed before the deportation. It is now our job to confirm that the woman known as Ruth was in fact legally deported; that any occurrence which may have led to her death and burial in a mass grave during insurrections in her native land was out of our country's hands.

Evidence has been presented, using historical sources, about her arrival here with her mother-in-law, the revered Lady Naomi, adoptive mother of our first hereditary president, Lord Obed. It is, however, unclear how accurate these accounts are, as the two arrived during a period of mass immigration, both legal and illegal. Lady Naomi and the woman called Ruth apparently fled to this country, leaving their men-folk slaughtered in the uprising. They arrived with nothing and Lady Naomi used her contacts as a citizen here to gain employment for herself and her daughter-in-law, Ruth.

In what we have reviewed, there is the suggestion that Ruth may not have been entirely honest with Lady Naomi and used her womanly wiles to inveigle her way into

Lord Boaz's household and indeed right into his bed. By these means she planned to have his child and thus cement her right to remain. It appears that she was denounced for espionage by a member of that household, possibly a maid with some grudge. The acts of espionage of which she was accused involved an old technology used at the time for transporting information, possibly involving the design of weapons. The woman known as Ruth worked in the fabrication process of these devices and could easily have coded information regarding arms and other secrets found in Lord Boaz's study.

Calls from the opposition have demanded an explanation as to how a woman who may have been Lord Obed's mother, should have been given a death warrant at that time, by being deported into a combat situation. During question time in the House, President David has deflected all questions about his ancestry, but would like to be covered by the review of the interview transcripts. Ruth, as she is known, may be his great-grandmother, though he prefers to think of her relationship as a myth put about by his enemies. He wishes a quiet resolution. President David has also commented that he considers the Lady Naomi as his ancestor. As the adoptive mother of Lord Obed, she is indeed legally recognised as President David's ancestor. This country owes such a lot to that noble woman as she was a major force behind her husband, Lord Boaz, standing for election and changing the constitution to make the Presidency a hereditary title. She greatly influenced the most excellent counter-immigration laws which are, of course, still in place today.

The transcript of the proceedings ends here.