

# The Hijab Diaries

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Hanna was a beautiful Austrian girl living in a multicultural area in Vienna. She was a student in medicine and, during the summer break, took on a summer job as a Starbucks barista to pay the bills. Her family was an ancient one, respected and even famous in her town in Styria, but not too wealthy anymore, and having moved from a small countryside town to the capital, she was always shocked at the high living costs of Vienna. Luckily, she had landed that summer job.

One day, she was heading there, minding her own business, thinking about a tinder date she had scheduled for that evening. She had already her makeup on and a pretty black leather jacket on as she was planning to head there right after her shift ended. At some point, she was stopped by a man at a stand where Muslims encouraged local women to experience wearing a hijab. She was kinda curious to try it on, just to see how it felt and how she would look, but on the other side she didn't like it as she saw it as a symbol of oppression and associated it to a negative meaning, being influenced by the echoes of Islamophobia that pervaded her surroundings. The man was really insisting and had a certain natural magnetism. They discussed for a while, until Hanna eventually accepted. She also realised that saying yes was probably the quickest way to get back on her way to work instead of discussing. A couple of girls took some hijabs and invited her aside of the stand. "I hope this won't take long" - she told herself.

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She was asked to take off her leather jacket and the top under that, leaving her almost in underwear, and then they began covering up her blonde hair and styling the hijab. There was something mesmerising in the Arab women's gestures to style the headscarf and their whispers in Arabic. Hanna listened to their whispers, without understanding them.

The fabric was tightly wrapped around her head, making her worry that it would mess up her hair. "Fuck, not today! I want to look good for my date this evening!" - she thought, but it was too late to back off.

She put on her top again, but was told to keep the leather jacket away, as it wouldn't match the modest outfit. She felt embarrassed and almost ashamed as the Muslim women did the final touches for the Hijab around her head and adjusted it, noticing the disapproving looks she was getting from her fellow countrymen. "God, I hope none of my friends see me right now!" - she thought, ashamed.

"You're all set up! Do you want to see yourself?"

"S... sure!" - Hanna replied, a bit skeptical.

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Then she looked at herself in a mirror. Her heartbeat accelerated. She looked so different! To a first impression, she looked almost like any other Muslim girl around, as her blonde hair had disappeared under the headscarf and her facial features looked different in a hijab. They asked her how she was feeling, and, uncertain on what to say, she replied: "Hmm, I look beautiful but... different!". They took some pictures and then told her that given how good she looked, she could keep the hijab.

Not wanting to lose further time, as she was already late for her shift, she thanked them and left, planning to take the hijab off once turned around the corner. However, it was tightly wrapped around her head, so she struggled. She started to panic, but people were starting to stare even more, as a woman taking off her hijab was something unusual. She thought about going back to the stand but decided to keep it on until she reached the Starbucks. She counted down the minutes as people stared her a lot on the subway and on her way to the place. Once she got there, a colleague of her, Yusuf, a Turkish guy, spotted her. She felt a wave of embarrassment. Not him! She was hoping to find any other colleague but him.



The irony of her situation. They had argued before about politics and gender roles, now, donning a hijab, Hanna stood enveloped in the very symbol they had spiritedly discussed.

"Who would have said, Hanna! That is quite a change!" Hanna replied in a mix of embarrassment and urgency "I can explain - this is not... I've not become a Muslim!" - she said, lowering her gaze, and explained her situation. "And I don't like it for the record, so I'm going to take it off immediately. Enjoy this sight while it lasts!" - she added, with a smirk, noticing the disappointment on his face. She left for the changing room, where she tried taking the hijab off, first gently, then frantically pulling it, to no avail, if not chocking herself. With one last push, she mistakenly grabbed her shirt, tearing it. "Fuck!" - she screamed. Yusuf knocked on the door of the changing room. "Hanna, my shift is over, are you ready?" "I... It's not coming off. And now my clothes are a disaster." - she said, opening the door. "Oh, I see" - Yusuf commented, with a smirk "Hmm... You could wait for Amina to come over to help you after your shift is done" "In 6 hours?" - Hanna said, in tears. "I'm afraid so. You could borrow her dress in the meanwhile". With a defeated look, Hanna nodded. She had a similar body type as Amina, and the modest dress would go well with her hijab.



She adorned herself in Amina's attire, the silky fabric draping her form in unfamiliar modesty. She put on the long, silky skirt covering her legs to her ankles and the top part, with a really high neckline, covering all of her skin, leaving only her face and hands visible. Hanna took a quick look in the mirror. She felt like she was wearing a costume. Too bad Carnival was over. Blushing, she walked out of the changing room area and stood behind the desk. Hanna didn't like it but she couldn't leave, or she'd lose the job, and she really needed the money. She took a deep breath and began her long day. Customers treated her differently. Old men and women were quite judgmental at seeing a beautiful Austrian girl with no hint of foreign accent wearing such an outfit. A couple of Arab guys seriously asked her if she was married. She blushed and nodded, to get out of the sticky situation, even though she was implying she was married to a Muslim man. What a shame, her, a pure-blooded Austrian girl, marrying an Arab, Muslim man. What would her family say? She felt as if a little electric shock went through her body, her nipples hardening at the idea. Shit, what a messed-up thought, she told herself, scrolling it off. Finally, Amina arrived. "Wow, Hanna! You look beautiful" - she said with a giggle. "Yusuf told me everything, let me have a look." "It has been surreal today" - Hanna commented "Honestly, I don't know how do you Muslim girls live with this!" "Oh, come on! It's not so bad!" - Amina replied.



After a careful inspection of the hijab, she sighed "Just what I feared." "Hmm?" - asked Hanna, panicking. "It's an ancient knot that I'm not familiar with, few women use it nowadays." "Why don't we cut it away?" Hanna asked, her face beaming. "We could, but" - Amina paused - "it's so intertwined with your hair, we would certainly cut most of your hair too if we did. Hanna gulped. "Don't worry, though. I know the girls at the stand, they hang out at my mosque. In fact, if you hurry up you could catch them before they leave!" "I... I can't, I have a Tinder date soon" - Hanna replied, disheartened. Amina smiled "Well, if you don't want to show up at your date wearing a hijab, you'd better reschedule. It's going to be a different evening, I'm afraid." Hanna groaned. "By the way" - Amina continued, with a sweet tone "I'm afraid I need my outfit for the shift. But worry not, I took with me an abaya you could borrow." Hanna meekly let Amina disrobe her, apart from the hijab, and dress her in an elegant black abaya, decorated with yellow and brown floral motifs and complete with gloves. "I bought it in Saudi Arabia" - she explained, while styling an additional matching layer on top of her hijab. "It's perfect for a visit at the mosque!"

On the bus on her way to the mosque, she texted her date, making up an excuse. It felt surreal to type a message on the Tinder app while wearing black gloves matching her traditional Muslim outfit.



Amina told her that the gloves were mandatory for a visit to the mosque, and Hanna didn't want to forget them on the bus, or she might miss a chance to intercept the women at the mosque. "Done" - she thought as she pressed 'Send'. She finally had a moment to reflect, after a day that felt more like a movie than real life. She noticed that most men and women were not sitting close to her, preferring to stand instead. She groaned. She did this too, sometimes, avoiding to sit close to an immigrant. Now she was basically one of them. At the following stop, another Hijabi girl came in and sat next to her, smiling at her. She lowered her glance. She looked even more exotic wearing the elaborate abaya her colleague gave her. She closed her eyes and tried forgetting about the situation she was in, but even then, the unfamiliar feeling of the headscarf reminded her of the situation she was in. She could feel her hair itching under it "I bet it's getting all greasy under there! Shit, I should probably book an appointment at the hairdresser when this shit will be over".

When she finally arrived at the mosque, she was impressed by how large it was, with a garden and everything. "Fuck, and they used taxpayers' money for all of this!" After a while, she found the women's section and, for a stroke of luck, she found the girls she had seen earlier.



They remind speechless after seeing the blonde Austrian girl still wearing a hijab, now complete with an abaya, and visiting a mosque. "Assalamu alaikkum" - they erupted "Have you reverted to Islam?" "No, actually... I tried to take the headscarf off but it got stuck. And this dress... I borrowed from a friend because I ruined mine." As she spoke, she realised the story made very little sense. The girls commented that God is the best planner and that she should keep doors open.

Hanna nodded and listened to their advices for a while. Then, she insisted, asking them to free her from the hijab, as they were the only ones able to help her. They agreed, a bit disappointed that they had failed in their mission, and told her to follow them to a private area where women could undress. She couldn't take her hijab off in a public area in a Mosque, after all.

Before removing it, though, the girls tried on a few other outfits on Hanna, who was too tired to fight back. She tried on a beautiful North African outfit borrowed it from one of the girl's friends and had to admit she didn't look half bad. She was getting a peculiar taste in terms of modest clothing after a while.





Finally, the girls begged her to try on one last dress, an outfit one of the girls had brought from home for a special occasion. It took a while to disrobe her - keeping on the infamous hijab, of course, and dress her up again, but when they were done and Hanna could finally open her eyes, she immediately noticed this was different. It was a white outfit, with lots of lace and pearls. They had even given her elaborate earrings. Hanna gulped "Is it... a bridal dress?" "Yes" - the Muslim girls said, with a giggle. "You look so beautiful!" "You would make your husband a very happy man!" - they commented. "Great, the first time ever I see myself in a bridal dress, and it's a Muslim one! I'll never be able to erase this image from my memory now!" - she thought, speechless. As they meandered through an open courtyard within the mosque's expansive grounds, their presence caught the attention of the Imam himself. Hanna's heart raced as she instinctively lowered her gaze, trying to disappear into the folds of the exquisite dress. One of the girls apologised "Dear Imam, we got distracted and didn't notice this was a common space. We beg for your pardon." "I see we have a newcomer" - the Imam noted, his displeasure evident at the breach of decorum - "Yes, she's interested in Islam, and she wanted to try on a bridal dress because she is dreaming of finding a Muslim husband." "Is that so?" Caught off guard, Hanna scrambled for words, "I am curious, yes, but my knowledge is still quite limited, dear Imam," - Hanna replied, hating the girls for coming up with such a lie.



The girls, invigorated by Hanna's half admission, told the Imam about how she had tried on a hijab earlier that day and how her life had changed since, which wasn't even a lie.

The spiritual guide offered a warm smile and commented that indeed, God is the best planner. Then stared at Hanna and told her "I know you still have a lot to learn, but you can make your profession of faith already now. His infinite knowledge will guide you through your journey. Repeat after me: *La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammadur rasoolu Allah*". Caught in the moment and not wanting to engage in a difficult conversation, she hesitantly echoed the declaration, her heart beating like crazy: "*La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammadur rasoolu Allah*".

It hit her that from that moment on, she was officially a Muslim woman. "I am literally a Muslim now, everything's gonna change for me, what am I doing?" - she thought. Her, Hanna, an Austrian Christian woman, was now a Muslim? She thought about the stories she had heard about the way those who rejected their Muslim faith were persecuted and nearly fainted, feeling trapped. She nearly lost her balance, a reaction that seemed to validate the spiritual leader's genuine optimism for her. "Let her rest" - he told the girls "She just had the biggest day of her life so far." He added, and left, leaving Hanna with the girls.



Overwhelmed themselves and unable to articulate their feelings, the girls assisted Hanna in changing out of the bridal gown and into the black abaya, recognizing that there was no longer any justification for her to dress otherwise, when Hanna started crying.

"Why did you let this happen to me? I'm so fucked! I can't possibly tell my family about converting and I can't keep pretending everything is normal, while dressing like this? What will everyone think? People will recognise me! I'm sorry, but I have to take back my words. I cannot commit to Islam."

In response, her friends began softly reciting a prayer. Hanna felt mesmerised again by their words. "Could there be some truth to their beliefs?" - she thought, before quickly dismissing the thought. After a few seconds, the girls stopped and began staring at her in awe. "What's happening?" - Hanna asked, confused. "Your eyes," one friend whispered in disbelief, "they've changed to brown."

Hanna felt a wave of dread. The emotions of that day made her mind shake. "That's not possible" - she said, reaching for her phone.



Activating the camera, she was confronted with the reflection of her eyes, now a deep shade of brown, a stark contrast to their usual green. "It's just the lighting," she attempted to reassure herself, though her conviction wavered. The girls dragged her to a changing room in the women area.

The light was stronger, but her eyes were still brown.

One of the girl finally began taking off her hijab, to allow her to see herself better. As her hair became loose, the girls erupted in a spontaneous scream, followed by more rounds of prayers. Instead of the blonde waves she had just a few hours before, luscious dark brown curls cascaded on her shoulders.

"No! No! This can't be!" - murmured Hanna in a mix of shock and contemplation.

"This can't be happening... I'm becoming one of you!" - Hanna added. She frantically tugged at her newly darkened locks, but they were undeniably her own. Her hair was dark brown up to its roots. Even her skin tone had darkened by a couple of shades, she noticed, matching with her darkened complexion.



It took her a few minutes to process what had happened to her. She had the warm complexion of Middle Eastern women, even though her facial structure remained the same. She was an arabised version of herself. People would barely recognise her now, no matter what she would wear. Her student ID looked nothing like her, as her driver's license did. Her life was drastically changed. "So, this is real? God wants me to embrace Islam?" - Hanna asked herself.

For the time being her first problem was going home. The thought of returning to her shared apartment in such a drastically changed form was overwhelming. In a mix of fear and urgency, she hastily draped a loose veil over her hair, not wanting to get stuck in it again but feeling a strange urge to cover her hair, and left the mosque in a hurry, eager to leave that place that seemed cursed for her.

Lost in her thoughts and physically drained, Hanna roamed without direction until the reality of her fatigue set in, steering her towards home despite her apprehension. The thought of her flatmate's reaction to her new appearance caused her heart to race with nervous anticipation, yet she recognized there was nowhere else to go.



Hanna stepped softly into the apartment she shared with Emma, another girl from Austria. She had hoped to slip into her room unnoticed, but Emma was in the kitchen. Her gaze fixed on the unfamiliar brunette in a black abaya, and asked her "Who are you? And how did you get into our apartment?"

Feeling a knot in her stomach, Hanna improvised, "I'm Yara, a distant cousin of Hanna's. She said she'd be out of town for a bit and that I could use her room while she's gone."

Emma raised an eyebrow. "That's strange. Hanna didn't mention that. A cousin, huh? I can see the resemblance. She never mentioned having Muslim family members, though."

Blushing, Hanna replied "She'll send you a message. Yeah, my mother is Hanna's aunt. She converted to Islam when she married, and since then, there's been a bit of distance between her and the rest of the family," she explained, hoping Emma would buy into her lie.

Emma nodded, understandingly, but then warned, "Just watch out for the landlady. She's not the most progressive person and might not be too happy about having a Muslim tenant." Hanna gulped. She was a second-class citizen now.



Hanna finally made it to her bedroom, where she finally disrobed from the traditional Muslim outfit she had been wearing all day long. With a sense of trepidation, she examined the transformation her body had undergone. A natural olive skin tone, different from a simple tan, had spread through her body, a stark contrast to its previous paleness. The changes didn't stop there; to match with her darker complexion, her pink nipples had darkened to brown and her previously blonde pubic hair had become black and curled. Apart from her face shape, she looked like a completely different person, and was hardly recognisable as her former self. How could she explain all of these changes. Overwhelmed, she sat on her bed, tears streaming down her face.

Her gaze drifted to the abaya draped over a chair, a stark reminder of her current situation. Was this attire her inevitable future? Did she belong in Muslim modest clothes from now on? She murmured her first prayer to Allah, begging for guidance and then, too tired to keep on thinking, she finally fell asleep.

When she woke up, the unfamiliar feeling of her long wavy black hair surrounding her face, she realised it had not just been a nightmare.



Feeling isolated and in need of support, but too embarrassed to reach out to her old friends, Hanna called her colleague Amina for help and guidance. "How did it go? Did they manage to untangle the hijab?" "Er, yes, but... It's a long story. Could you come here? Don't freak out when you see me, I have... changed." When Amina arrived at the address, Hanna opened her the door. The long, wavy dark hair, the brown eyes and olive skin looked nothing like her friend. "Hanna?" Amina gasped, her eyes widening at the sight before her. "Yes, it's me. I looked like this when I took off the Hijab! I don't really know what to do!" Hanna confessed, her story spilling forth in a torrent of emotions. Amina, though initially shocked, stepped into her role with grace. "Oh dear sister, what happened to you is a proof of the power of the almighty! This is the push you needed. After your conversion, you were afraid of people's judgment, now you won't bother anymore because your own family would struggle to recognise you." "But..." - Hanna, clinging to a sliver of hope, tried to ask her if there was a way to take back her word. Amina, however, remained firm. "The path you've found yourself on... it's irreversible. You've given your commitment. You are now a Muslim, and this is not something you should take lightly, you don't want to disappoint the Almighty." Hanna nodded, tears flowing down her cheeks. "Aww, sweetie, I know it's a lot to take, but I can help you to adjust to all of this." - Amina added, with a reassuring smile.





With Amina's deep understanding of the new world Hanna was navigating, she became an indispensable mentor to her. Hanna found herself naturally following her advice, soothed by Amina's comforting yet firm tone, and slowly realising she didn't have a choice anymore.

"Let's start sorting out your wardrobe" - Amina said, delving into Hanna's extensive collection of fashion-forward attire, which included dresses, crop tops, miniskirts, and fishnet stockings. Hanna had an attractive, lithe body and had never been afraid of showcasing it. "Hmm, you've got so many revealing outfits here, that has to change. You'll dress modestly from now on! We should sell them and use the proceeds to purchase more modest outfits!" "Everything? But... But..." Hanna faltered. "Yes, everything. It's for the best. You'll see, avoiding temptation will be simpler this way."

After having reluctantly sold all of her outfits for a modest sum, Hanna followed Amina to a shop specialised in Muslim attire located on the outskirts of Vienna. Hanna's brown eyes went wide just by looking at the covering outfits. "I thought you meant just outfits showing less skin, do I really need to wear the headscarf and everything?" the perspective of having to cover her hair in front of strangers for the rest of her life was daunting. And what about all the prejudices against Muslims? Would she have to face that now? "Yes, it's mandatory for Muslim women, but don't worry, you'll love it, my dear!" - Amina answered with a smile.

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Amina helped Hanna put on a silky blue abaya dress with hijab, simple, yet elegant. The Austrian girl was really struggling to put it on, making it obvious that she was new to Hijab. That attracted some empathy from other hijabs girls who encouraged her by telling her she looked beautiful, or simply smiling at her.

The first time she'd seen herself wearing a hijab shocked her, but it was a temporary experiment. Now, she was committing to this lifestyle permanently. She felt a pang of regret for having gotten rid of all of her Western clothes to fully embrace modest clothing. She missed the way a tight cocktail dress and stockings highlighted her figure. "No no, this can't be my life now" - she thought - "I can't belong in headscarfs and covering dresses from now on!"

"I don't know, I understand that modesty is important, but I kinda liked the way I looked in a crop top or a dress... I feel so ugly now." - she commented, while examining her mirror image, the contours of her figure obscured by the flowing abaya.

"Remember, you're bound to look less attractive in hijab... that's kind of the point. Do you really need strangers to know how pretty you are? If you think about it, wearing a hijab is the most empowering thing you can do as a woman; robbing men of their ability to judge you for your looks and force them to see you as a person!"



"I guess you have a point, I never saw it that way" - Hanna replied, in a humble tone.

"Anyway, there are many different kinds of modest clothing. You can still develop your own style. You're already familiar with the Hijab and the Abaya" Amina said, picking a covering black outfit "but the world of modest fashion is vast. If you're leaning towards a more conservative style, wishing to keep your mouth and nose hidden from the public eye, then a Niqab might suit you."

Hanna hesitated "I... I'm not sure I'm ready to embrace that path just yet.", but Amina encouraged her, "Think about it, nobody would ever recognise you, you'd feel protected... and it might be more comfortable than you think!" - she said, handing her the black outfit with an encouraging smile.

Still skeptical, Hanna slipped into the black dress with Amina's guidance, its fabric cascading to the floor, and paired with silky gloves that concealed her delicate hands. It felt odd. Gazing at her reflection, Hanna felt a mix of emotions. She couldn't deny she had a certain grace and elegance, yet she was starting to resemble a young woman from Iran or Afghanistan, so different from her old self. "Ready for the finishing touch?" Amina prompted, encouraging her friend's transformation.



Amina added a matching black veil that covered half of Hanna's face, introducing her to the unfamiliar feeling of a niqab graciously covering her mouth and nose. Now her identity was completely gone, and she looked just like any ultra conservative Muslim woman. Hanna felt a sudden excitement she could hardly explain. Her nipples grew hard and, even through the covering dress, Amina could notice the excitement. "Am I into this now? Being a submissive Muslim woman?". "It feels special, I know! Who would have said someone like you would have liked it, though!" - Amina said, with a laugh. "Ehm, I feel really confined, but also protected and safe" - Hanna replied, embarrassed, her voice muffled by the veil. "But I could never find a job, dressed like this! Even wearing hijabs leads to discrimination!" "My dear, I don't know how to phrase this but... there are more important things than a career for a good Muslim woman." "Like what?" "Embracing the role of a good wife and mother, one day. Besides, your student ID doesn't even resemble you anymore, so it might be time to reconsider your plans," Amina gently suggested. The thought of abandoning her dream of becoming a doctor brought tears to Hanna's eyes. "But I've always wanted to become a doctor and..." "Shh" - "Shh," Amina soothed, "Everything will work out. You have your coffee shop job. I'll speak to our manager about your...change; it should all be okay."



The prospect of turning a summer job into her sole income and career path was demeaning, but she had to admit Amina was right. Her best chance now was to secure a full-time position as a barista at Starbucks, a considerable descent for someone who once aspired to a career in medicine. "Yes, please talk to him! I can't really lose that job right now!" "See how your priorities are already changing?" - Amina replied with a laughter.

Amina took pleasure in the reversal of their roles. Hanna, who once held a sense of superiority due to her prestigious field of study and viewed Amina as an ignorant underachiever, she was now dependent on Amina's guidance to navigate the complex situation she was in. On top of that, having Amina worked at the coffee shop for way longer, she was poised to become Hanna's natural supervisor for the foreseeable future.

"Anyway, you're right, you can't wear a niqab at work, that would be too much. We need to find you some less conservative outfits! You should definitely buy the niqab, though! You could wear it for special occasions!"

They tried on several outfits, more and less conservative, and Hanna's appreciation for Muslim fashion deepened.



"Hmm, you know what? Let's try on something more colourful, this is the kind of outfit you could wear on special occasions, like Eid Mubarak!"

The outfit was completely different, elegant and sophisticated. The ensemble featured a dress with a high neckline, adorned with intricate lace detailing, contrasting beautifully with the solid color of the dress. The sleeves of the dress were made from a sheer fabric with the same lace detailing, billowing out before gathering at the wrists, creating a very feminine silhouette.

Complementing the dress were elegant black gloves, also embellished with lace, to add a touch of grace but also adhere to the modesty aspect of the attire.

Hanna was speechless. She felt like some sort of Muslim princess in it! Never had she imagined that a modest, full-length dress could serve as festive wear, yet the reflection staring back at her was undeniably striking. She oozed an elegance, a sense of tradition and modesty that she never did before. "This is so... not like me at all, yet I kinda like this, after all" - she thought.



“Mesmerising, huh?”

“I have no words, it’s actually beautiful! I never thought I would learn to enjoy hijab fashion!”

“Let’s explore more Eid attire!” - Amina suggested eagerly.

Next, Hanna tried on a long-sleeved blush pink hijab dress with intricate lace detailing. Over the dress, there was a wide satin belt in a shade of muted rose, accentuating her thin waist. The skirt part of the dress was pleated, giving it a full and flowing look. The outfit was completed by a matching hijab in a similar blush pink color, styled neatly around the head and neck. Completing the ensemble were simple black gloves, contrasting with the light colors of the dress and hijab.

Every outfit Hanna tried on, was a further blow to her identity, reshaping her fashion sense. Why would she miss her skin-revealing outfits, when she could look so elegant wearing an elaborate Eid outfit?



After some more outfits, Hanna was definitely hooked. One of her main concerns about her new lifestyle was the limited outfit options and the feeling of looking unattractive. However, seeing herself now, she was surprised and even scared by how much she relished her new look.

"This is so unlike me" - Hanna thought, contemplating her altered appearance. "How can I like this so much?"

"Can I try another niqab on before we leave? Maybe something more elaborate?" Amina produced an embroidered black niqab with a wide smile. The feeling of the niqab covering half her face spread a new warmth in her body once more. "I feel so safe like this, my face is unrecognisable, my voice is muffled. Nobody could ever suspect I'm anything else than an Arab Muslim woman and that's scary and reassuring at the same time" - she explained.

Ultimately, Hanna decided to purchase several outfits, including a black niqab, along with several other pieces, including an elegant, silky beige hijab, that enhanced her silhouette and made her feel like a princess.





“See, you can still feel pretty in modest clothing” “It’s so true, Amina! I ... I think I could live with this!” - Hanna said, parading in the streets of Vienna in one of the satin hijab dresses she had just bought, enjoying her looks..

During that afternoon, she spent all the money she had received for the clothes she had sold, plus some, Amina insisted on selecting only the finest silk garments for her. At the end, Hanna was nearly broke, which given her reduced career perspectives, was distressing.

Amina comforted her again “It’s an investment, don’t worry! You’ll marry rich by looking like a princess!” “Oh please!” - Hanna scoffed at the notion. The idea of marriage seemed a distant thought to her young mind. However, the western idea of dating was not really accepted in Muslim society, so marriage was the natural next step for a pretty young woman like her. Hanna hadn’t thought much about that, and she certainly didn’t want to argue with Amina, so she simply replied “Maybe!”

“No, I’m really serious, we need to find you a nice man soon! I’ve just got the feeling that you might really make a great traditional Muslim wife!” - replied Amina, with a honest and friendly smile.



"Well, I don't know... I'm taking baby steps by now. I'm still so new to this culture." - Hanna said, blushing. Yet she had to admit to herself she was intrigued.

"It's very important that you remember that you are only allowed to marry Muslim men now. It's one of the pillars of Islam."

"Oh, I didn't know that!" - she replied, taken aback by the sudden narrowing of her social and romantic options. After a moment of reflection, she added: "Hmm, by the way, are we... Muslim women, really expected to be subordinate to men?"

"Women have a very important role in the Muslim world. But well, men are in charge of us - they are our protectors and maintainers. So yes, we should be obedient to men who are striving to protect us as they have our best interests in mind."

Hanna mulled over this information, finding it challenging to reconcile with the stringent gender norms presented. "I understand..." she said, her voice tinged with hesitation as she grappled with these new concepts and their implications on her personal freedom and autonomy.



“Picture this: a man who not only cherishes you but also ensures your every need is met, spoiling you with the finest outfits. Imagine not having to work long shifts at the Starbucks. How does that sound?”

“Pretty great actually!” - Hanna confessed, caught off guard by her own attraction to such a conventional marital concept. “That would be quite a change.” Hanna's heart was beating fast. Why did she like this idea so much? She had always been a feminist and...

“And you would only take the hijab off in his presence.” - Amina continued

“Oh wow... I kinda like hijabs now though... I could get used to this” - she admitted with a smile. The feeling of femininity and safeness a modest outfit gave her was something she would never have expected.

“To show him your beautiful black curls...” - Amina continued.

“Haha stop! Besides, I’m still not used being a brunette!”

They kept talking about Hanna’s future perspectives as a Muslim woman, further intriguing the former blonde.



Hanna's return to Starbucks marked a significant moment in embracing her new identity publicly. It took a lot of courage and she considered find a job in retail somewhere else, just to avoid being recognised but she realised she had to start somewhere, so she might as well start there.

Amina stepped in to brief the store manager about Hanna's recent conversion to Islam, which necessitated a change in her dress code. The manager was quite surprised, not only by Hanna's drastic shift in faith but also by her choice to prioritize her barista role over her academic pursuits. Nonetheless, he expressed no objections, only emphasizing the legal restriction against wearing a niqab in public spaces due to its concealment of the face. Since he wasn't very familiar with Hanna, her altered eye color went unnoticed by him.

Her job at Starbucks became a full-time occupation for Hanna. People definitely treated her different since becoming a hijab girl and while on her first day as a hijab barista they could tell from her eyes and skin that she had probably converted recently, she now passed for a second-generation immigrant from a Muslim-majority country, resulting in even more blatant xenophobia by some customers.



Yusuf was pretty surprised when he saw Hanna wearing a hijab once more at her return.

"Hey, Hanna! Is it still stuck?" He asked, not fully grasping the situation.

"No, um... That was just a silly excuse, I wasn't ready to openly admit it, but... I have converted to Islam, this is who I am now." she replied, biting her lips for the embarrassment.

"Wow, that's incredible... I mean, congratulations, I'm really happy for you! It's just such a surprise, you know? I would have never expected that from you!" Yusuf expressed, his astonishment genuine.

"Well, me neither, honestly, it shocked me too but... I have changed my mind about lots of things recently." - she replied, humbly.

Yussuf, unable to hide his curiosity, pressed further with a playful grin "Does that include your strong opinions about gender roles?"

"Yes, they are all gone. I was wrong." - she replied with a modest smile.



Eventually, Hanna found herself grappling with the inevitability of visiting her family in the serene countryside of rural Austria. She had avoided contact with her family and old friends, restricting herself to occasional phone calls, as her voice had remained unchanged. However, she couldn't keep on postponing forever. Also, she was afraid that someone might recognise her in Vienna and post a picture of her in hijab on social media, before she came out to her family and friends. Preferring to take her destiny into her own hands, she decided to visit her hometown, in full modest dress.

Hanna realised she had to work on her appearance to disguise the changes she had undergone and to restore her original features, else they might not recognise her. She faced the mirror with a mix of apprehension and determination. She carefully applied layers of a lighter foundation, meticulously blending it to mimic her original porcelain complexion, contoured her features and applied green contact lenses to complete the look. She still looked of a different nationality, with the dark, voluminous curls that framed her face giving her an exotic look, but there would be no need to dye and straighten them, as they would be hidden beneath the hijab.

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Hanna put on a satin beige hijab dress to complete her look, carefully hiding her dark curls beneath the hijab.

She now looked just like she did before her sudden transformation, just a Muslim version of herself. It felt good to recover at least an apparent resemblance to her own identity. "They should at least recognise me now" - she thought.

Amina, who had suggested to accompany Hanna, joined Hanna in her apartment before leaving for Styria. "How do I look?" - asked Hanna, always insecure about her changing looks. "Perfect! Ooh, those green contacts look good on you! You look just like a halal version of old Hanna!" "Amina, do you think my family will accept me like this?" - she asked her best friend, lowering her gaze. "I don't know, sweet Hanna, it's going to be a big shock for them, that's for sure. I remember you told me of how conservative they are. But remember, no matter what happens, the most important thing is to remain strong in your faith, anything else comes afterwards." "I know. But I'm scared" - Hanna replied, hugging Amina for comfort.

They took the train from Vienna and hoped for the best.



Walking from the local train station to her parents' home, Hanna felt the piercing stares of the locals. "It's even more intense here than in Vienna," Hanna remarked. "People here aren't accustomed to seeing hijabs" - commented Amina. "It feels so weird to be back in my hometown looking like this..." - Hanna thought. "Everything looks so familiar and yet, people stare at me as if I was a stranger."

Determined, Hanna reassured herself, "I'll be assertive. I'll explain I've converted to Islam but I'm still the same person. They love me; it'll be okay."

While Amina and Hanna were deep in conversation, an old school friend, surprised by a familiar voice, couldn't believe what she was seeing: a Muslim girl wearing a hijab who sounded just like Hanna. Taking a closer look, she realized the girl was indeed Hanna. "Hanna?" she asked, taken aback.





"Hey, Julia!" Hanna greeted her, turning around and recognizing her, albeit with a hint of embarrassment. "I almost didn't recognize you... Why are you dressed like this? Have you become..." Julia trailed off, unsure. "Yeah, I'm a Muslim now." "Wow, I didn't see that coming... Well, as long as you're happy." Julia responded, though her tone carried a mix of skepticism and surprise. "'You're not being forced into this, are you?" Julia inquired, concern edging her voice. "No, no," Hanna quickly assured her, annoyed by the common misconception. This was her choice, not influenced by anyone else, she reflected. "Have you told anyone else?" "Not really, no. Amina here is now my closest friend. I'm actually here to break the news to my family," "Oh, that must be tough," Julia sympathized, understanding the weight of the revelation that awaited Hanna's family.

Instead, it turned out to be a disaster, her family were shocked when they saw her dressed in Hijab, they asked her if it was a bad joke, and got scared when they understood it was not the case. They thought she had been radicalised and brainwashed by a Muslim partner, and ultimately scolded her for betraying her culture. Hanna even took off her lenses to convince them that she had undergone a supernatural transformation and that, having felt the power of Allah, she had to submit to him, but they didn't trust her words.



When Hanna left the house in tears, Amina tried to comfort her with a smile. "It didn't really go as planned, huh?"

"My family rejected me! They said I am a disgrace to them and they disowned me! I'm really on my own now!"

"My mum gave me this" - Hanna showed Amina a picture of herself dating back to a just few months before, her beautiful blonde hair cascading to her shoulders, wearing a revealing traditional Austrian dress highlighting her cleavage. She look gorgeous.

"I... I'm struggling so much. - she confessed - I... I miss how I used to look, how I used to act, the communities I used to be a part of... everything that made me *me*! I feel like a shell of myself. I'm trying to find a way to feel like myself again whilst not compromising Islamic values but it's just not happening."

Amina tried comforting her but this time her experience couldn't help her, having always been surrounded by a proud Muslim family.

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"The truth is that I come from an Islamophobic country which totally rejects my existence as a White Muslim. I don't even feel a connection to my cultural identity at all anymore. God, I wish I could keep a link to my national heritage while also staying true to my faith!"

As she said these words loud, Amina smiled and then began praying.

Slowly but surely, Hanna's features changed on her journey home. Her lighter foundation disappeared, her lips became fuller, and her nose developed a longer, more defined profile. Her facial structure subtly shifted, her cheekbones more pronounced, giving her a Middle Eastern appearance. Amina observed these transformations with quiet awe, choosing not to alarm Hanna before she got home, though inwardly she was thrilled to see Hanna transforming into a young Arab woman. Now Hanna could live her new faith in peace. Remarkably, Hanna's fluency in her native German language seemed to fade, now tinged with an accent that suggested it wasn't her mother tongue. Hanna noticed her speech had become slurred but thought she was just dead tired from the emotions of that day, so she eventually stopped talking and focused on the landscape behind the train window.



Hanna decided to stay at Amina's place for comfort, feeling the need for some companionship. As she finally disrobed from her hijab, Amina finally voiced her observation.

"Hanna, I've been meaning to tell you this for a while now. Your face has changed again... I'm afraid you're fully Arab now!"

Hanna couldn't focus on what Amina told her. The sound of the language sounded familiar, yet it didn't make sense. On the contrary, the Arabic language, once foreign, now flowed naturally from her lips "ماذا؟ لا أفهم" - "What? I don't understand" - Hanna replied, pissed. Amina, taken aback, noted Hanna's fluent Arabic, marked by a distinctive Moroccan accent. In Arabic, she explained "Habibi, you've changed again! And your German... It seems you've forgotten it."

Hanna caught her reflection, confirming Amina's observation. Fuller lips, a newly defined nose, and elongated facial structure stared back at her. She was a hot Arab woman, no amount of makeup could disguise that. A mix of panic and excitement set in as she lamented, "This is too much! Now I'm completely trapped in this identity! I never wished to become Arab!" - then she realised her wish had been somehow fulfilled. No longer did her nationality conflict with her faith; she was now a typical Moroccan Muslim woman, her cultural and religious identities now in perfect alignment.



"Search your documents," Amina suggested to Hanna. Rummaging through her drawer, Hanna's hands trembled as they uncovered a Moroccan passport. "Layla Idrissi?" she read, her voice tinged with disbelief. Her heart was beating fast. Her pulse quickened; she had transformed into a Moroccan woman, leaving her previous identity completely sealed behind. Amina's reaction soon turned into a revelation that intertwined their lives even more deeply. "We're distant cousins now!" Amina exclaimed, a statement that brought an unexpected sense of connection and yet, a profound confusion to Layla.

Memories surged within Layla, sketching the outlines of a life that was alien, and yet intimately familiar. She envisioned her family back in Morocco and her struggles in Europe, where she had joined Amina, her now-revealed cousin, in Austria, only to face insurmountable challenges due to language barriers and cultural differences. "No, no, this is not me" - she told herself. and yet, her original memories felt distant and unreal like a dream.



Layla found herself feeling like a stranger in the country she once called home. She could only speak some heavily accented English when she needed to communicate with locals, so she preferred to gravitate towards Amina and the welcoming community at the mosque, where she found solace in regular prayers. Obviously she'd lost her job, as her ability to communicate with customers had been lost in the transformation. She realised she would have to return to Morocco soon.

"Don't worry, you will be fine. I'll come to visit, and our family will find you a good husband!" Amina assured her. However, this notion of marriage stirred a complex mix of emotions in Layla. The prospect of marriage as a Moroccan Muslim wife, an attempt to anchor her in her new identity, also signified a surrender to a life predetermined by her transformation. Despite these reservations, the thought of having someone by her side in this unfamiliar chapter of her life provided a certain comfort. The independence she had known was now replaced by an uncertain reliance on others. Layla found a reluctant acceptance within herself. "Yes, that sounds good" - she conceded, acknowledging the necessity of adapting to her new reality.



Using the last of her salary, Layla booked a flight to Morocco, embarking on a journey to reconnect with a family she had never known, yet felt inexplicably drawn to. As she stepped off the plane and into the warm embrace of Morocco, the faces of her family, richly tanned and etched with the tales of the African sun, shocked her and yet offered a sense of belonging and reassurance she hadn't felt in Austria. The realization struck her - this connection, however new, was infinitely more comforting than the prospect of returning to her islamophobic family in Austria, who was unable to accept her initial change change, let alone this complete transformation. After the initial cultural shock from the unfamiliar land, so different from what she had been used to, her attitude changed. The implanted memories, initially foreign and disjointed, began to weave themselves into the fabric of her consciousness, grounding her in a heritage she was still learning to embrace.

In the days that followed, Layla found herself immersed in the rhythms of Moroccan life, the vibrant markets, the calls to prayer echoing through the streets. Layla cherished the normalization of her faith in Morocco, where being Muslim was the majority experience. The freedom to express and live her religion openly, without fear of judgment or discrimination, imbued her with a sense of peace and belonging.



Her family, warm and welcoming, eagerly shared stories of their ancestry and the land that had shaped them. The memories, once implanted, now felt lived, as if Layla had always been a part of this tapestry.

As she began to settle into her new life, her family, recognizing her adjustment, introduced her to local young men. They were drawn to her unique beauty, and her family's endorsement only heightened their interest. Layla found herself at the center of attention, a position she navigated with a mix of apprehension and curiosity. Each introduction was an opportunity to further root herself in her Moroccan identity, to understand the customs, values, and expectations that would define her future. She liked how confident and possessive the men were, nothing like those she had dated in her previous life, in Austria.

For Layla, this was more than just a search for a partner; it was a continuation of her transformation, a step towards fully inhabiting her new identity. With each conversation, each shared laugh, and each story exchanged, she felt herself weaving into the social and cultural fabric of Morocco. The thought of marriage, once daunting, began to represent not just a union with another person, but a deeper connection to her new life and community.





She finally settled for Ali, a charismatic young man, only a few years older than herself. Layla's wedding was a vibrant affair, deeply rooted in Moroccan traditions. The ceremony was held in a picturesque courtyard, adorned with intricate mosaics and the scent of jasmine hanging heavy in the air. As Layla moved gracefully among the guests, her happiness was undeniable. Amina arrived, her heart heavy with worry for her friend, unsure of how Layla had adjusted to such a drastic shift in her life's trajectory. However, the sight that greeted her was one of contentment and joy. Layla, who had once struggled to find her place, now stood confidently as a woman who had found her home. "I was so worried for you," Amina confessed as they found a quiet moment together. "This must be so different from what you had envisioned for yourself... I regret not having been there for you more."

Layla smiled warmly at her friend, her eyes reflecting the depth of her journey. "No need to be sad for me," she assured Amina. "I look forward to my life as a wife and a mother. I do not miss my old life." The sincerity in Layla's voice and the peace in her demeanor alleviated Amina's concerns. It became clear that Layla had not only accepted her new path but had flourished. She had discovered a sense of belonging and purpose that her old life in Austria could never have provided.