

Challenge

DECEMBER 2024



Avery had always been a girl with plenty of potential. As a child, she was the rising star of the local courts. Coaches described her “a future champion.” It was more than enough to keep her dreaming. But at some point success seemed to slip through her fingers. As the years wore on, her shine dulled. Minor victories in small tournaments were overshadowed by bigger losses, and each defeat chipped away at her confidence.

No matter how many grueling hours she spent on the court, something always seemed to hold her back. Then came the injury, a small tweak in her shoulder, enough to make her miss the most important tournament of her career. Watching from the sidelines as less-talented competitors lifted trophies that should have been hers was torture. She cried until she couldn’t take it anymore.

By her mid-20s, Avery was ready to let it go. The plan was to retire quietly, maybe finish her economics degree and find a steady job. Maybe become a part-time tennis coach.

It was during a quiet moment of reflection, standing at the edge of the court, that her second chance came.

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Avery was startled when her phone buzzed with an unknown number. The voice on the other end introduced himself as a movie producer. He explained that her name had been recommended by her former coach. "We're working on a film where the lead character is a tennis player. We need someone to coach the actress, help her nail the body language, the movements, everything. Possibly someone her age, with her build. And I'll be honest, this isn't just anyone. It's Zendaya." The name hit her like a serve to the chest. Zendaya. The Zendaya. "I... wow. I don't know what to say." "Say yes," the producer said with a chuckle. "We'll fly you out next week if you're on board." Avery grinned, her voice steady despite her racing heart. "Yes. Yes, of course."

Avery had been thrilled at the idea of coaching Zendaya, but reality hit like a double fault. Zendaya was... terrible. Absolutely terrible. Despite her efforts, hitting the ball cleanly seemed a Herculean task. After weeks of fruitless practice, it was clear. Zendaya wasn't going to convincingly play tennis anytime soon, and the producers were against the use of CGI for the movie. "I can't do this," she confessed. "I'm not good enough, and I'm ruining this for everyone."

One afternoon, as Zendaya fumbled another backhand into the net, the producer pulled Avery aside.

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"Listen, we've been brainstorming a solution, and... it's not ideal, but it might work. We don't have time to keep training Zendaya. The movie's schedule is already tight, and the tennis scenes are crucial." He hesitated, then forged ahead. "What if we made you look like Zendaya, just for the tennis shots? No dialogue, no acting. She'll handle all of that. You'll just handle the court scenes."

Avery blinked, certain she'd misheard. "Wait. You want me to... *be her*? Like, a body double?"

"Exactly," he said, as if her grasping the concept made it sound more plausible. "You're her size, close enough in build, and with some makeup, tanning sessions, and —uh—a bit of cosmetic touch-up, no one will notice. It'll save us time, and the shots will look completely authentic."

Avery's stomach turned. "Oh, God. This is..."

"Obviously, your compensation would reflect the additional... commitment." His voice took on a smoother, more persuasive tone. "In fact, it'd increase by a factor of ten." he said, letting the number linger in the air.

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Avery gulped. A million dollars. For tennis shots. For a moment, the absurdity of the situation faded as she imagined what she could do with that kind of money. Pay off her debts, secure her future... maybe even take another shot at tennis with financial stability backing her. "You mentioned surgery?" she asked hesitantly. "Just a few minor adjustments," he replied smoothly. "A nose job, a little work on your cheekbones. And we'll use melanotan to make the tan look natural. Makeup will take care of the rest." She hesitated, caressing her cheeks as she weighed the decision. Finally, she nodded. "I guess... I could do that."

The changes were slow but effective. The melanotan shots altered Avery's complexion, giving her natural, sun-kissed tone a darker shade that mirrored the mixed-race woman's warm glow. A subtle tweak to her cheekbones brought her closer to Zendaya's profile. Bit by bit, her face morphed into the likeness of the star. It was distressing but fascinating to watch as her identity vanished. She was even instructed to mimic Zendaya's body language, gestures, facial expressions while playing on the court for training.

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One afternoon, Zendaya strolled into the practice court, her usual charisma lighting up the room. She watched Avery for a moment, arms crossed, before smirking and walking up to her.

"So," Zendaya began, a playful glint in her eye, "they told me they've officially given up on me. Guess you'll be paying the price for my failures, huh? Haha!"

Avery flushed, embarrassed. "No, I..." she stammered, trying to find the words. "I'm... happy to help."

"Sweet!" Zendaya said, her smile widening as she leaned in conspiratorially. "Listen, I'm sorry they had to change your features, though. You were so naturally pretty, but hey, it's showbiz, right?" Avery nodded awkwardly, unsure how to respond. "It's ok... You are so pretty... I am honored to be turned into your doppelgänger!"

Zendaya clapped her hands together. "Nice! You know what? I'll lend you some of my clothes if you need them—after all, we're basically going to be twin sisters soon!" Avery couldn't help but laugh. "Thanks, I guess." As Zendaya turned to leave, she added with a wink, "Just don't upstage me, alright? Only one of us gets the Oscar."

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After a rather dramatic rhinoplasty giving her the wide, African nose that made Zendaya so ethnic, the transformation was over. As the swelling subsided, Avery stared at her reflection, dreading what she'd see. The wide, African nose gave her a perfect resemblance to the actress. Her lips, darkened and subtly plumped, curled into a small, incredulous smile. "Fuck, I am her now!". She placed a hand on her face, the altered cheekbones a subtle reminder of the permanence of the changes. The tan wasn't going to fade, the facial tweaks weren't going to reverse themselves. "Stuck like a movie star," she said with a soft chuckle, leaning closer to the mirror. "What a life."

Avery spent hours practicing facial expressions every day. By now she had learned to pose like a diva too. A strict diet also gave her the lithe physique that made Zendaya so attractive. She lost some muscle tone and stamina, but it was worth it. She could still play well, but for shorter sessions, rather than long, real tennis matches.

Under the bright lights, wearing Zendaya's costumes, and moving with the actress's grace, Avery felt like a different person. Between takes, she lounged with the cast, laughing and joking with actors who barely seemed to notice the lines between her and the real Zendaya. But as the initial excitement ebbed, a thought crept into her mind. *What happens after the movie?*

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Late that night, she knocked on Zendaya's hotel room door. Zendaya opened the door, her face lighting up in surprise. "Avery! What's up?"

"I just... I need to talk to you. I know the shooting's almost over, but... I don't want this to end. I love this."

"Avery, I was afraid this might happen. Look, you're an amazing tennis player. You have your own career, your own future. I know the dieting has already affected your performance. You can still get your physique back, reclaim your game. And... I know some surgeries are not reversible but we could still make you look a bit different. I would pay out of pocket, I feel responsible for..."

"No," Avery interrupted firmly. "I don't want that. I *like* looking like you. I'm done with tennis. Maybe I could do some promotional events. Promotional events. I could pose with a tennis racket, hit a few balls for cameras, and make it a show. We could raise money for underprivileged kids or fund tennis programs in struggling communities." "Well, if that's what you want, we can look into it."