

Through New Eyes

SEPTEMBER 2024



As Abigail stood in front of her mirror, she traced the outline of her face with her fingertips, staring into her own blue eyes, framed by blonde hair with bright pink highlights. Her reflection was bold yet innocent, youthful. She adjusted her pink party outfit, the one she had carefully chosen for the evening, a fundraiser party, meant to raise money for Palestine. It was a chance to embody her beliefs, to show her solidarity with those she believed were oppressed. As a liberal arts college student from a second-tier New England city, Abigail had been swept up in the rising wave of activism on campus. The Palestinian conflict had become a focal point, and she felt compelled to be more involved.

Her mind buzzed with the echoes of the chants from the last meeting, the rhythmic call of *"From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free"* still pulsing in her ears. It stirred something in her, a mixture of hope, anger, and a deep need to be part of something bigger than herself, although had she been asked to tell the name of the river and the sea she was referring to, she would have not been able to answer.

Abigail checked her phone again, tapping her foot against the floor as she waited for Tyler to arrive. He was like her in many ways—liberal, outspoken, and driven by a deep sense of justice. His mixed heritage, with a Black father and white mother, had shaped him into someone who navigated the world with careful thought and a strong sense of empathy. He had a skinny frame and wore his hair cropped short, his style simple but effortlessly cool.

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Abigail stood alone in front of the mirror, checking her phone again. Tyler was running late, as usual. As she paced around her dorm room, the familiar, comfortable clutter of books, protest signs, and mismatched furniture surrounded her. She glanced at her reflection one more time—the pink party dress hugging her form, the spark of rebellion in her eyes. Everything felt right. Life was good.

Then, in the blink of an eye, the world around her shifted.

She gasped, her breath catching in her throat as the room began to morph. The dull paint of the dorm walls faded into sleek, pristine white. The old mirror she had stared into moments before became an ornate, framed masterpiece reflecting a space far more elegant than her student apartment. The clutter disappeared, replaced by polished furniture, soft, luxurious fabrics, and a much better mirror. Her pink party dress dissolved into an elegant black dress, the fabric cool and smooth against her skin. Her hair, previously adorned with playful pink highlights, now was all blonde, styled into soft, sophisticated waves. She looked like a much wealthier version of herself.

She blinked a few times. Was she tripping? She had tried shrooms on campus a few times, but this felt different: so real, so sharp... “What the hell...?” she whispered to herself, stepping back from the mirror, her mind racing. This was no hallucination. This was real.

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As Abigail tried to make sense of the bizarre change, the door to the apartment creaked open. She squinted through the corridor and saw Mrs. Rosenstein, her Jewish landlady, stepping inside. The woman looked as calm and composed as ever, as if nothing was out of the ordinary. "Mrs. Rosenstein?" Abigail screamed, taking a step towards her. "What's happening? Where am I?"

The middle-aged woman smiled softly, her face full of kindness but with an edge of something deeper, something powerful. "Abigail's, my dear, don't be alarmed. You live here and I'm still your landlady. This is just a small change of perspective."

Abigail's eyes widened. "What? So you're behind this? How did this happen? Is this magic? Or did you drug me and drag me to one of your mansions?" - she asked, scared that her political opinions had somehow triggered the Jewish lady.

Mrs. Rosenstein sighed gently. "You're a good girl, Abigail. But you were taking a dangerous road and, in the passion of your beliefs, you forgot there are many different perspectives. I just wanted to give you a glimpse of another path. Remember, there are people on every side of every issue, and sometimes we forget to look at life from the other side."

Abigail shook her head, still reeling. "How is this supposed to change my mind?"

"Oh, I'm not done with you, this is just the beginning!"

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As Abigail stood in front of the mirror, still reeling from the transformation of her surroundings, she noticed something strange happening to her reflection. It started slowly at first, a subtle shift in the color of her hair. The blonde strands began to darken, the pink highlights fading into memory. Her scalp tingled as her hair deepened to a rich, glossy black, cascading over her shoulders in soft waves. "Hey, my hair!" Abigail screamed, her voice trembling as she watched her features change. She blinked, stunned, and watched as her blue eyes began to change too. The color drained from them, the icy blue melting into a warm, deep brown. Her fair skin darkened ever so slightly, taking on a golden olive hue and lost some glow, making her look like a little bit more mature. "Fuck, stop this!" - she cried. Her nose, once petite and upturned, elongated, its shape becoming more prominent and defined.

Abigail gasped, bringing her hands up to her face, feeling the new contours of her nose. Her appearance had morphed before her eyes, her features unmistakably shifting into those of a young Jewish woman in her late 20s. Her heart pounded in her chest as she stepped back from the mirror, trying to process what was happening. She had been Abigail Turner, a liberal, blue-eyed, blonde girl with a passion for activism. But now, with her black hair, dark eyes, olive skin, and vaguely Jewish features, she looked like someone else entirely—someone you could not casually join a fundraising event in favor of Palestine without raising suspicion and being bullied.

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She ran her fingers through her newly dark hair, the strands soft and unfamiliar. Her olive skin was showing faint signs of aging, such as barely visible fine lines, which, without making her less attractive, gave her face a more mature allure. "Oh my God, my face!"

"Mrs. Rosenstein..." Abigail called, her thoughts swirling in confusion. This had to be her doing—this strange magic, this bizarre shift in reality. Was she a witch or something?

She walked over to the bedroom, where the lady was waiting for her, her reflection still following her in the mirrors, dark and unfamiliar. Mrs. Rosenstein had the same calm, knowing expression. Abigail turned to face her, her eyes wide, her hands trembling slightly.

"Look at me! What have you done?" Abigail asked, sounding like a Manhattan native.

Mrs. Rosenstein met her gaze steadily, her smile soft but unyielding. "I've given you a chance to walk in different shoes" she said slowly.

Abigail swallowed hard. "As a Jewish woman? This isn't me!"

Mrs. Rosenstein nodded gently, her expression full of sympathy but firm. "For now, it is. Ruth. That's who you are."

"Ruth?" The young brunette echoed, her voice barely more than a whisper, her disbelief palpable.

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Mrs. Rosenstein's smile remained soft but resolute. "Yes, Ruth. That's who you are now. Take a look."

The young Jewish woman reached out with trembling hands, lifting the top document from the pile. It was a birth certificate, yellowed at the edges but unmistakably official. Her breath caught in her throat as she saw the name printed clearly at the top: **Ruth Miriam Levine**. Beneath it, details that felt foreign yet unsettlingly real: a birthdate of November 2nd, 1994, making her 29 years old.

"I'm old... Fuck!" Ruth stammered, shaking her head as she dropped the papers onto the table, her hands still trembling. "Oh sweetie, you're not old at all. 29 is such a fine age!" - the lady commented, with a smile.

She rifled through the documents, her stomach sinking with every new piece of evidence. There was a resume from a prestigious law firm, a diploma from Yale Law School, even clippings from a political column she had apparently written. "I studied law at Yale... I'm a lawyer in New York?" Her voice cracked with horror as she uncovered more of this new life. "An outspoken supporter of Israel? Oh my God, I'm a Zionist!" Her brown eyes widened in shock, her pupils dilated with disbelief.

"Careful with those words, they will be used against you." Mrs. Rosenstein stepped closer. "You are everything you once hated," Mrs. Rosenstein said firmly, her voice calm but unyielding, "and everyone around you knows you as such." You will now live as Ruth Miriam Levine, a Jewish woman who has seen life from a very different perspective than your own. You've always been passionate, Ruth, always fighting for what you believe is right. But belief is shaped by experience. This will help you see things from a new perspective."

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"Please, turn me back," Ruth pleaded, her voice trembling. "I'll do anything you want, just turn me back."

"No, Ruth, you will be a much better person like this. Plus, I made you wealthier than you ever would have been in your original life. With that career path, you would have ended up an overweight librarian at best. You should be thankful. All I'm asking in exchange from you is for you to reconsider your opinions."

Ruth swallowed hard, fury bubbling up inside her. "I am never going to change my opinions," she hissed, her voice filled with defiance.

Mrs. Rosenstein sighed gently. "You will, Ruth. But I won't force you. I just want to show you that the world is complicated, that it's never as simple as we often think. You still have your convictions, and that's a beautiful thing. I'm just offering you a new perspective. What you do with it is entirely up to you."

Ruth's shoulders slumped as the reality of her situation began to sink in.

"What about my family?" Ruth asked, her voice cracking with worry. "They'll look for me."

Mrs. Rosenstein's smile was sad but resolute. "Abigail doesn't exist in this reality, dear. Your parents... they have a son instead. Luke."

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Ruth took a deep breath. So this was it. She was really Ruth. "Who... How is my family now?"

"Your parents have retired and live peacefully in the countryside," Mrs. Rosenstein explained. "And, like many Jewish Americans, you have relatives in Israel. One of your cousins is even fighting in the Israeli Defence Forces."

Ruth's heart sank. "Oh for fuck's sake, noooo!" she cried, a wave of desperation washing over her.

Needing a moment to herself, she quickly excused herself to the bathroom. Once there, she stood in front of the mirror, staring at the reflection that both fascinated and horrified her. For some twisted, perverse reason, she couldn't stop looking. Seeing her youthful, blonde self replaced by a more mature-looking Jewish woman was like watching a car crash—impossible to look away, even though it pained her.

"Why did you make me so fucking old?" Ruth hissed, her reflection glaring back at her. "I have wrinkles! I'm a mature woman!"

Mrs. Rosenstein, who had followed her to the door, simply chuckled. "Stop being overdramatic. You're a beautiful young lady around 30, ready to get married and start a family."

"Married?" Ruth shot back, incredulity dripping from her voice. "I'm not planning on getting married anytime soon!"

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Just then, the doorbell rang. Ruth's heart leaped in her chest, and her first thought was of Tyler. "Tyler!" she gasped, panic rising in her voice. "I can't let him see me like this!" But Mrs. Rosenstein shook her head, an almost amused look crossing her face. "It's not Tyler, silly" she said gently. "You can do better than him now. Jewish girls from good families do not date Black liberal guys." Ruth's breath caught in her throat as confusion clouded her mind. "Then who...?" "It's a driver sent to pick you up for your date," Mrs. Rosenstein said, matter-of-factly. "With Benjamin, my son. He's a lovely guy." Mrs. Rosenstein's smile widened with pride, the warmth in her voice unwavering.

Ruth's stomach flipped, a knot of conflicting emotions forming. "What? Benjamin, the one in the military?" The thought of dating a man in uniform—especially one associated with power and violence against civilians—repulsed her deeply. And yet... alluring about it, an unfamiliar and unnerving thrill. "You should see him in uniform!" Mrs. Rosenstein added with a wink, pulling out her phone and showing Ruth a photo. Ruth's face grew hot as she felt a blush creeping up her neck. *No... she thought, horrified at the unexpected rush of excitement that stirred within her. I don't... I mean, I can't... but damn!*—a new and unfamiliar attraction flaring to life in the pit of her stomach. Men in uniform, something that would have disgusted her before, now turned her on. She bit her lip in frustration, shaking her head. "You set me up? You made me an ideal date for your son?" Ruth muttered, incredulous, as the reality of her situation settled deeper into her consciousness. The idea that her identity had been crafted, her desires subtly altered, made her feel even more trapped. Mrs. Rosenstein chuckled softly, as though all of this were just a gentle nudge toward some inevitable future. "Oh, Ruth," she said gently, her voice laced with understanding, "you'll find that life has its own way of bringing people together."

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The landlady gave her some encouragement and accompanied her to the entrance, where a driver in a limousine was waiting for her. "Wow" - she thought "I never had a personal driver before".

The ride was long and silent. On her way to the restaurant, she couldn't stop feeling bad for Tyler. She wanted nothing more than to jump out of the limo, flag down a taxi, and find him. But what would she even say? Realistically, how could she explain this? How would Tyler react if a Jewish woman with a thick New York accent showed up in place of his sweet, blonde Abigail? He would hate her. He wouldn't recognize the person standing in front of him. Ruth sighed heavily. "I hope he's doing ok without me. There's nothing I can do for him now. Poor Tyler...".

The driver left her at a fancy modern restaurant, in an area of the city where she had never been before. She was alone and intimidated by the whole situation she got caught in and had little choice but to wait for her date. She thought about the man she was going to date, she already hated him. A US soldier and a Zionist, ugh. Yet, her new body and mind found that *extremely* appealing. And, in all honestly, the idea of dating a real grown up man who was doing something with his life was pretty appealing.

Sitting at the table in the restaurant, she fidgeted with the silverware, nerves buzzing under her skin. She was even thinking about leaving when Ben walked in. She immediately recognized him from the photo.

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He was handsome, muscular, confident, and so effortlessly elegant in his tailored suit. Something inside her clicked the moment she laid eyes on him. He was just her type—now, at least. She stared at him with a dreamy look. He had short black hair, military cut, hazel eyes and a healthy tan. He was very fit and oozed confidence and raw masculinity. A flush of warmth spread through her as her mind drifted, imagining him in uniform, holding a big rifle. *Oh, weapons!* she thought, almost surprised by the surge of excitement that followed the image. She could feel a rush of something dark and exhilarating stirring within her. She had just unlocked yet another one of her new passions. She was a gun lover, just like any self-respecting American—or at least that's what she seemed to believe now. Her fingers twitched at the thought, as if itching to feel the cool metal of a firearm in her hands. It was strange, this sudden obsession. Just days ago, she would have scoffed at the idea. But here she was, her heart racing at the thought of target practice, the thrill of precision, the power of control.

Ruth's stomach twisted in disbelief. *What the hell?* she thought, her mind reeling. She had always been a fierce advocate for gun control, fighting for stricter laws to prevent senseless violence. And yet... here she was, salivating for a fucking US marine. She set aside her disgust for a minute and smiled flirtatiously at him.

"You must be Ben," she said, her voice smooth, almost flirtatious despite herself. She extended her hand, her eyes locking onto his. "I'm Ruth."

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As Ruth and Ben settled into their conversation, the topic naturally shifted to politics. Ben leaned in slightly, his expression serious. "Have you heard there's an event to fundraise for Palestine tonight at Evergreen Valley University? Basically supporting terrorist organizations like Hamas," he said, shaking his head. "I've been thinking of bringing it to the attention of the local authorities. Maybe you could help with your law knowledge?"

Ruth felt her stomach tighten. *That was the event she was supposed to attend*, she thought. But instead of revealing that, she forced a smile and nodded, trying to sound convincing. "Yeah, oh yeah, sure, I hate those fucking liberals!"

Her cheeks flushed with embarrassment. Was that really her talking? Yet, the thought of attending it seemed absurd. She was Jewish, and the idea of being there—especially now—seemed not only dangerous but deeply conflicting. Ben smiled, seeming pleased with her response. As the conversation moved on to the upcoming elections, he leaned in again, clearly passionate about the subject. "Trump did so much for Israel," he said, his voice carrying a note of pride. "Moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem was huge. It's insane that so many Jewish Americans don't see this!"

Ruth's mind spun as she tried to keep up with the conversation. *Trump?* She had once been a fierce critic of his policies, especially when it came to social justice issues. But now, that Ruth didn't seem to exist. "You're not one of them, right?" Ben asked, a playful smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth. "I saw you at a Trump rally recently. It was on Instagram."

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Ruth nearly jumped out of her chair. "I did?" she blurted out, her heart racing. *No way*, she thought in disbelief. Was she really a Trump supporter now?

Her fingers fumbled for her phone, desperate to confirm—or deny—what Ben had just said. But there it was. A photo of her, clear as day, wearing a bright MAGA cap and an outfit proudly emblazoned with U.S. flag patterns.

Ben chuckled, but there was a hint of nervousness in his voice. "We've been chatting for a while online, so I did some stalking, just to be sure I wasn't dating a double-faced liberal, haha!" He paused for a moment, gauging her reaction before adding, "I hope that doesn't bother you."

Ruth forced a laugh, her mind spinning wildly. "No, no, I get it, sure. I'm a total Trump fangirl," she replied, the words slipping out more easily than she expected, even as a wave of shame washed over her. It was so easy to slip in that role, though. Everything hinted at it and it made her feel appreciated by Ben. And she had to admit, there was a part of her that liked the way Ben looked at her now, with approval and admiration. *Oh God*, she thought, her mind drifting. *He's so different from Tyler*. Ben was confident, strong, exuding the kind of masculine energy that made her feel like she was with a man, not a boy.

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Cool!" Ben said with a grin, his eyes lighting up. "Then why don't we go to the next one? There's a Trump rally in Philly next week. It's just a couple of hours by car from here."

Ruth hesitated for a split second, the remnants of her former self screaming in the back of her mind. But she pushed it down, that quiet rebellion barely a whisper now. "Er... Sure!" she agreed, flashing him a smile that felt almost too easy.

What am I becoming? A fascist? she wondered, but that thought faded quickly as Ben smiled back at her, making her heart race for reasons she couldn't quite explain.

When the dinner was over, Ruth found herself drifting back to thoughts of her past self, the contrast between then and now striking her like a wave. She had just finished a fantastic date with a handsome man in his early 30s, in a luxurious five-star restaurant, and to her surprise, she had genuinely enjoyed every moment of it. The conversation, the flirtation, the way Ben looked at her—it all felt intoxicating. Gone were the days of cheap takeout and late-night debates with Tyler about social justice. It was like she had joined a new league in life—a world she had never thought would welcome her so easily. Ruth felt a strange, guilty sense of satisfaction. She was no longer on the outside looking in. She was part of something different now—something glamorous, something powerful. And as much as she hated to admit it, she liked it.

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Ruth sat in her apartment, half-paying attention to a YouTube music video playing on her TV as she absentmindedly scrolled through her phone. When the video ended, autoplay suggested a news update from a right-wing podcast. The bold title from WIRED caught her eye, but she was too distracted to notice at first just how biased the reporting was. After a few minutes, she finally tuned in, irritation creeping in as she realized the slant of the commentary.

With a groan, she skipped past it, hoping to return to something more neutral. Instead, a Ben Shapiro video began to play. Ruth sighed, leaning back on the couch as his rapid-fire speech filled the room.

"...I feel terrible for people who have lived under the thumb and currently live under the thumb of Hamas, which is a national terrorist group, or the Palestinian Authority, which is a corrupt oligarchy that steals money from its people and leaves them in misery, or Islamic Jihad, which is an actual terrorist group and..."

His voice bothered her, yet she found herself listening. He sounded more reasonable than she had expected, his words did actually make sense. For a split second she felt a perverse joy in acknowledging that she was becoming more conservative. She skipped the rest of the video but her YouTube feed was now flooded with similar content. The algorithm had picked up on her viewing patterns, and her chronology was saturated with right-wing opinionists. Every recommendation seemed to pull her deeper into this new world, the voices of conservative pundits beginning to resonate with her more than she had ever imagined.

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The next morning, Ruth arrived at her office in the bustling heart of New York City. She sat down at her desk, preparing for the day ahead, but as she began scrolling through case documents, something hit her. She *knew* this work. The legal jargon, the processes—everything felt second nature to her now. She had always despised law student because all they could think about was how much money they were going to do and yet she realized with a sinking feeling that she was now one of them.

As she skimmed through her financial records, she noticed her student loans had already been paid off, thanks in part to her wealthy family. She was even saving for a down payment on a new apartment in the city. That would have realistically never been possible at the age of 29 in her original life path. The thought flickered through her mind before she could stop it: *Hopefully, it will be with the man of my dreams*. Her cheeks flushed involuntarily, and she found herself smiling. *Ben would make a fine husband*.

She groaned inwardly. *Oh no, not again*, she thought. *These thoughts...* Abigail, buried somewhere deep within Ruth, tried to resurface, but the pull of this new identity—this new life—was too strong to ignore. It was all too easy to slip into it, to let the desires and ambitions of Ruth take over. To distract herself from the confusing emotions swirling inside her, she focused on her work.

The case file in front of her was about a pharmaceutical company being sued by employees who claimed to have developed health problems from chemical exposure in the workplace.

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Great, Ruth thought with a surge of excitement. I can still make a difference and fight for justice!

But her enthusiasm was short-lived.

As she delved deeper into the case, the realization dawned on her: she wasn't fighting for justice. She was defending the pharmaceutical giant. Of course, she thought bitterly, *this Ruth lady*—the person she had become—would only care about profits. She would never stand with the unionized, blue-collar workers who were struggling to protect their health.

Ruth spent the rest of her day immersed in documents, meticulously preparing for the court hearing. The case centered around the testimonies of ill employees at the pharmaceutical plant, and by the afternoon, she found herself standing before the judge, questioning each worker. Her questions came out cold, calculated, and precise. She poked holes in their claims with a sharp edge, focusing on any inconsistencies, no matter how small. The feeling of power and superiority felt intoxicating.

A flicker of self-awareness surfaced in her mind, like a shadow slipping through the cracks. *Jeez, I'm such a cold bitch*, Ruth thought, almost startled by the realization. She remembered a time when she would have felt deep sympathy for these people, for their struggles.

Leaving the courthouse, a small amount of protesters had gathered, chanting for justice. A lone voice said something like "Look at that Jewish bitch!". "What the fact that I'm Jewish have to do with... I mean, I'm not even Jewish I think." - she thought in her mind. A rush of rage built up inside her.

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A few days later, Ruth stood in front of her mirror, getting ready for her next date with Ben—this time, at a Trump rally. Ben had insisted that she wear the same outfit she had in the Instagram picture, the one she had no memory of, but there it was, waiting for her in the closet: a TRUMP hat and a U.S. flag dress, completed with red tights.

Ruth slipped into the outfit and took a long, hard look at herself in the mirror. The sight was almost too much to bear. "Good Lord, this is sick," she muttered under her breath. She straightened her hat, trying to swallow her discomfort. *I hope it will be worth it.* Deep down, she knew Ben had a way of making everything feel worth it.

As she finished getting ready, Ruth's phone buzzed with a message. It was from her landlady, Mrs. Rosenstein. *I'll be stopping by in the afternoon,* the message read. "Shit," Ruth muttered to herself, glancing at the time. Mrs. Rosenstein could arrive any minute. Panic washed over her as she quickly tried to strip off the MAGA outfit, not wanting to be caught in such an absurd getup. But just as she began pulling the dress over her head, she heard the distinct sound of the key turning in the lock. Realizing she had no time, Ruth resignedly put the dress back on and stood there, bracing herself for the inevitable barrage of sarcastic comments. The door opened, and Mrs. Rosenstein entered with a laugh. "Oh dear, what a metamorphosis! I see you are adjusting yourself well!" Ruth flushed, embarrassed, as she tugged at the hem of her dress. "I... I'm going out with Ben, to a Trump rally. I'm just... playing a part to impress him," she explained, feeling the discomfort in her voice.

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Mrs. Rosenstein's expression shifted, her smile fading slightly as she fixed Ruth with a sharp gaze. "So, you're lying to my son?" she asked, her tone cool, cutting through the air like a knife.

Ruth's heart raced. She didn't want to lose Ben, but she didn't know how to explain what was happening inside her—how conflicted she felt. "No, I mean..." she stammered, words tumbling awkwardly out of her mouth. "I'm adapting, trying to be the best possible girlfriend for him."

Mrs. Rosenstein's sharp gaze softened just a little, but it remained intense, as if she was searching for something deeper in Ruth's eyes. "Good," she finally said, her tone lowering but still firm. "But I want to see a change in your heart, not only in your exterior."

Ruth stood there, unsure of how to respond. She could feel the weight of Mrs. Rosenstein's expectations pressing down on her. It wasn't just about playing a role for Ben anymore—Mrs. Rosenstein wanted more. She wanted Ruth to embrace this new life fully, to believe it, to internalize it. The rally was buzzing with excitement, the energy electric as the massive crowd roared in anticipation of Trump's arrival. Despite Trump's own fears about turnout, the place was packed—loud, enthusiastic, and charged with emotion. Ruth had been afraid of being surrounded by the same people she had once despised, but to her surprise, she was impressed by how warmly they welcomed her. She had always believed that Republicans were hostile toward women, but here she was, a young Jewish woman showing her support for Trump, and she was met with friendliness and approval.

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The speech began, and at first, it was the usual fare. Trump's predictable attacks on Kamala Harris barely made her flinch now. She sat through the commentary on the Democrats, the familiar rants about election fraud, but her attention wandered as her mind processed the fact that it didn't offend her as much as it used to. "Any Jewish person that votes for her or any democratic, has to go out and have their head examined" - Trump said at some point. She exchanged a laughter with Ben. He was by her side, his hand resting lightly on her back. The strange feeling of presenting themselves as a young conservative couple was almost thrilling in its own way. It made her feel rebellious in her own way, and part of something larger—something she had never imagined being a part of.

Then Trump shifted to a darker topic—the return of the Muslim ban. His words were laced with fearmongering, talking about how terrorists could be hiding among refugees, among ordinary people, and suddenly, without warning, a thought crossed Ruth's mind: *Muslims... I hate those people.*

She gasped inwardly, startled by the realization of what had just passed through her thoughts. *Oh God*, she thought, her heart sinking. *That was a real, genuine thought.* It wasn't planted there by someone else—it had come from her own mind. For the first time, she felt it—a natural hatred rising within her, a need to categorize strangers as threats. It was primal, ugly. A single tear slipped from her left eye. *I'm becoming one of them*, she thought, horrified. *I'm not better than this people..*