

Hijab day - Swap

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The bright, vaulted ceilings of the terminal felt as expansive as the adventure she was about to begin. She was just half way through her trip, in a north African airport on her way to West Africa. She carried her luggage personally from one plane to the next given the large overlay and her fear of losing her outfits in the way.

Anja was your average German girl, pretty, with an angelic face and a slim body.

She had met Abdoulaye, a young man from Guinea, during her studies abroad, and his invitation to visit his home country had eventually led her across the globe to this very moment.



Aminata had been promised to Abdoulaye for a while but since meeting the pretty German, he couldn't stop comparing her to Anja.

She was very curvy, of course, and that was one of her strong points. One of the few, to be fair. She looked quite unremarkable otherwise. Abdoulaye found her kind, devout, the kind of woman parents would love to see married to their son. Not an exciting personality though.

Anja instead was very pretty. Abdoulaye found himself lost in her blue eyes every time they talked. And she knew so much about science, history, was vivacious, so independent. Too much too be a good wife, and she had no religion or honor.



Despite her precautions, Anja's luggage had been erroneously sent to Dakar, instead of Konakri. While her luggage was transferred to the right destination, she had been presented with an abaya and hijab belonging to Abdoulaye's younger sister that she shopped in Dubai and then left behind after getting married and gaining some weight. She looked up with a mixture of confusion and hesitation. "Are you sure this is a good idea? Abdoulaye. "It should work for a day or two. Besides, what would people see if they saw me with a woman dressed like you? In this way, you'll show respect to the local culture too and you'll get less attention".



The black abaya with a matching hijab was surprisingly pretty but also tight and uncomfortable. Anja needed some help from Abdoulaye's mum to wear it. The whole procedure was long and uncomfortable.

"It's too much!" - Anja said - "It's too covering, I don't want to be seen like this!"

"By whom, my family, my neighbors? People who don't know you anyway? They'll admire you actually."

Whatever, she thought. Not that I really have a choice until my luggage is found.



Meanwhile, a drug administered to her by Abdoulaye took effect.

Anja felt relaxed, then tired, her muscles stopped reacting to her until she fell down on a carpet. She didn't injure herself luckily.

Abdoulaye was standing a few meters away and, strangely enough, didn't react in any way. He simply looked at her and smiled. Anja quickly loses consciousness a few seconds later, still wondering what the heck was happening to her.

Abdoulaye lifted Anja up and took her to his basement, where Aminata had been trapped with an excuse. She was so much lighter than the Black girl, he noticed!



During his studies in Europe, Abdoulaye had connected with a reclusive neuroscientist dismissed from his institution for unethical experimentation. His research involved targeted memory editing using precisely timed drug cocktails paired with audiovisual conditioning. The overlay of personality traits, value systems, even subconscious preferences, by weakening certain synaptic connections and reinforcing others.

Anja had been under for a few days. In that time, she had been exposed to Aminata's recorded voice recounting family stories, Qur'anic verses, lessons on modesty and marriage, and a taste for rich, fried food. The process was crude, invasive, but it worked well enough.



Meanwhile, Aminata—locked in the same basement—had been exposed to recordings of Anja’s university lectures, feminist podcasts, and workout motivation clips.

Several hours or days later Anja woke up in the same position where she had fainted. Her eyelids fluttered open. She was lying on the same patterned carpet where she had fallen, the thick fabric of the abaya twisted softly around her legs. For a moment, she felt disoriented—as if waking from a deep, dense dream. Then, a wave of calm washed over her.

It was unfamiliar, this serenity. Her usual restlessness, that buzzing need to move and know and do, had softened into something quieter.



She noticed the way the hijab framed her face, the gentle weight of it on her head and shoulders. It felt... nice, proper. She smoothed a hand down the front of the abaya, finding comfort in its coverage.

Strange, she thought, but the thought itself was slow, patient. Her mind felt different—like a library where some shelves had been rearranged.

She thanked God for being in good health again, in fluent Arabic. The words had left Anja's lips smoothly, almost musically—a flowing Arabic phrase her mind hadn't consciously formed. Praise God for the blessing of health. beamed, replying warmly in the same language.



She froze, the spoon halfway to her mouth.

“What have I just said? What? I’m not even religious, let alone Muslim!”

The thought was sharp, wholly her own—a fragment of the old Anja, surfacing like a breath from underwater. She felt a sudden, dizzying split inside herself: the serene, modest woman who found comfort in the hijab, and the rational, secular student who would have scoffed at thanking God for anything.

The new neural pathways—the ones reinforced with recitations and traditions—pushed back gently, insistently. But it feels right. It feels peaceful.



The suitcase stood in the corner of her room. Abdoulaye stood beside it, a relaxed smile on his face.

"Hey, Anja, your luggage has arrived!"

Anja looked up. Her heart gave a little leap. "Good," she said, "I'll finally change out of this outfit before dinner." Her voice was pleasant, but inside, the thought of removing the modest garments brought a surprising pang of reluctance, followed by a flush of shame at caring so much. As she stood, her eyes lingered on Abdoulaye. The afternoon light from the window caught the line of his jaw, the confident ease in his posture. "God, he looks so hot today." - she thought, blushing.



The silver crop top was fitted and sleek, designed for rooftop parties. The matching miniskirt was short enough to let her legs show, the dark fishnet stockings a bold, fashionable choice. It was an outfit she had worn confidently just weeks ago—perfect for this climate too, she had thought packing it. It had made her feel free, modern, in control. Now, it gave her the chills.

She turned slightly, her reflection moving with her. Her midriff was bare between the hem of the top and the waist of the skirt. Her legs, sheathed in the intricate web of fishnet, seemed on lurid display. A deep, instinctive shame tightened in her chest.

Why does it feel so weird to be dressed like this?



Her mind supplied the response, in Aminata's internalized voice, now woven into her own: *Because you are showing what should be kept for one person. Because you are inviting stares, not respect.*

She met her own eyes in the mirror. The blue was the same, but the expression was different. There was no boldness there. Only a growing horror. *I look like a prostitute.* The thought was vicious, cruel, and it didn't feel entirely her own. It was an echo of a judgment she had never before passed on herself, or on any woman. It was a judgment born of a different set of values—values that now felt embedded in her soul. *I can't let them see me like this.* What would they think?



She took a moment to reflect on her drastically changed set of values, without realizing its true source.

Still confused, she went to the closet, where Abdoulaye's sister had left many abayas. They were embroidered, rich, decorated. She felt one with her hands. Its texture was crisp, it looked almost unused. She would feel modest and at the same time regal in them. She would feel like a queen, not a prostitute.

"I... I need to borrow one of these!" - Anja thought. Surely, Abdoulaye and his sister wouldn't mind. She would explain she wanted to honor and respect local traditions rather than dressing like a tourist.



Anja carefully removed her revealing outfit and put on the black embroider abaya dress. It fit her perfectly, with elegance and modesty. She felt dressed as a proper lady now. Almost, at least. Her hair looked off. She couldn't explain why but the idea of letting people see her pretty blonde hair just like that felt off, too. As if the abaya wasn't modest enough, she began styling her hair in a modest bun. She scoffed. Not enough. She went back to the closet and found a matching black hijab with golden embroidery.

"I can't believe I'm doing this" - she mumbled fixing the hijab tight around her head.



"There. Why was it so easy to put it on this time?" - she mumbled, surprised by seeing how she managed to wear the hijab flawlessly with a few, measured moves despite her lack of experience with Muslim fashion, as if she had inherited some sort of muscle memory from the clothes's owner.

A deep sense of peace finally descended upon her, feeling properly dressed, modest and beautiful.

"That's it. I think I'm a hijabi for life. I can't imagine being seen without a hijab." - she told herself in awe.

She checked the time. It was almost late for dinner. She gulped and tried preparing some explanation for her hosts.



"Hey, sorry for being late..." - she said after a few minutes, opening the door to the large living room.

"Wow... I thought your luggage had arrived..." - Abdoulaye said, faking surprise.

"Yeah, it's just that... I can't explain it... I realized my outfits were a bit too daring, I prefer keep on borrowing your sister's abayas if possible!"

"Of course, you don't have to justify yourself for being modest! I'm happy you are starting to appreciate our traditions!" - Abdoulaye's father interjected with a benevolent smile, inviting Anja to sit down.



Anja did as she was invited to with a shy smile. She felt strangely intimidated by the old Black man and strangely submissive to men in general.

"I was skeptical when my son told me a young European woman would visit him but I see you are a modest young lady" - his father continued. "I hope you'll learn more from our culture during your stay!"

"Thank you Mr. Diallo. I'm really grateful for this opportunity to learn more about your culture and I feel like I have already been enriched by the experience, mashAllah." - the word slipped naturally from her lips, surprising her and making the man smile.



Meanwhile Aminata had completely changed her sense of fashion from one day to another, to the utter shock of her family. She shed the comfortable, concealing layers of her former self—the abayas, the kaftans, the hijabs—as easily as a snake sheds its skin to embrace dresses hugging her curves.

Her hair, a glorious, tightly coiled afro, had been resurrected. It no longer lay hidden, but sat upon her head like a crown, smelling of shea butter and the open air.

Why did I bury myself under all that fabric? What was I so afraid of revealing? The answer was irrelevant now.



A slow, powerful smile spread across her face. "My family will accept it. They'll have to." The thought was a shield as she grabbed her bag and headed out, the beat from the club down the street already a low thrum in her veins.

At the club entrance, she found her old friend, Aisha, in a constellation of flashing lights. Aisha's initial look of astonishment morphed into a loud, approving cackle that cut through the music. "Wow Aminata! You were such an old fashioned stuck-up prude until yesterday! Well, it's about time you joined the party. Especially since, damn, you definitely won the genetic lottery among all of us! Come on, the girls are not going to believe this".



As Aminata enjoyed her newfound freedom, Anja was setting up new rules. She realized she couldn't live under the same roof as a young, handsome - very handsome, in fact - man as an unmarried woman. What would people think of her? Abdoulaye's father understood and offered her a separate simple residence, separated by their house by some crops. It was simple and very traditional but Anja didn't mind it. Here she could preserve her dignity. She took with her a selection of abayas and hijabs donated by her host family.

She finally had some time for herself to reflect on what was going on in her mind, and realized she had to accept a few things she couldn't deny any longer.



Whatever made her change her mind, it was pretty clear that she was a Muslimah now. All of her secularism, feminism, critical race theory had lost any meaning to her, as she found peace and truth in a new religion and a new, traditional way of life.

She put on a simpler, more modest abaya dress and asked Abdoulaye's mother to accompany her to the mosque. Her heart was heavy as she explained her she wanted to convert to Islam.

The middle aged woman couldn't hide her joy. She asked her if it wa only to be able to marry her son. Anja blushed and denied. Deep down though, she knew that was also a bonus.



They headed to the town mosque, simple yet majestic.

Being the only white lady in the mosque made her feel embarrassed, as if she was just an impostor. Her blonde hair was concealed obviously but her white skin and petite body were at odds with the other women around her. She made a mental note to herself to gain some weight. She did not want to stand out more than necessary. Even her modest abaya felt out of place compared to the other women's colorful ones. She felt like a tourist. She was one, actually. Why then did it feel so wrong? Maybe Abdoulaye's sister had some more traditional one?



It was during a beach trip with Abdoulaye that something happened. Anja, modestly covered in her burkini, alone for once with Abdoulaye, confessed him how she realized she didn't want to go back, despite her family and studies. Not like this, as a modest Muslim revert. Not as in love as she was with the local culture and lifestyle. And with him.

Abdoulaye's heart beat like crazy when he knew he'd made it.

He told her he couldn't ask for any better news and promised her he'd take excellent care of her. She wouldn't need to finish her studies since he would provide for her, and her new family was to be built!



The wedding was prepared in a short time. Anja officially converted and took the name Aissatou. Aissatou Diallo. Not on her passport, of course, that said still Anja Arnold but in local documentations, she was registered as such. She felt so much at home there. And she loved her friend and wanted so much to become his wife.

The ceremony began with the nikah, the signing of the marriage contract, which specified the dowry the groom would give his bride. In Arabic, the bride and groom each repeated "I accept" three times. Aissatou felt warm tears of joy falling on her cheeks. She was a Muslim wife, married to a strong African young man, and that made her the happiest she had ever been in her life.



After the ceremony, however, the atmosphere changed. The formal part was over, and the celebration was beginning. Someone brought her a colorful outfit. "You're an African wife now!" one of the women laughed. "You've got to dress like one of us today!"

"You're an African wife now!" - they told her. "You've got to dress like one of us." "But... my modesty!" - she replied.

Abdoulaye explained her "Today is your day to shine," he said. "Modesty will matter in our daily life. But this celebration is special. I want my friends to see how beautiful my wife is." Aissatou shook her head, clearly uncomfortable. "I can't show my shoulders like this," she insisted quietly. "I'm a married woman now."



Abdoulaye cursed himself for having tweaked her mind to such a high level of modesty and nodded. - "Just like that bore Aminata."

Finally he nodded.

"All right," he said. "We'll find something else."

She tried out a few more outfits, that covered her shoulders properly.

The dress was still bright and festive, but it was cut more modestly, with long sleeves and a high neckline. Aissatou visibly relaxed as she slipped into it, adjusting the fabric carefully to make sure everything sat properly.

Abdoulaye looked her over approvingly.



"You look beautiful," he said.

He stepped closer and helped her wrap the matching turban around her head. Aissatou watched his hands carefully in the mirror while he adjusted the folds of the cloth. For a moment he studied the result, then—almost mischievously—he loosened one small fold of the fabric. A few strands of her straight, light hair slipped free at the front.

"A-Abdoulaye!" she protested softly, raising a hand to fix it. But he gently caught her wrist before she could. "It's fine," he said with a grin. "Just a little." She frowned at her reflection, clearly uncertain. "But it's showing..." "I want my friends to know I'm marrying a blonde!"



She adjusted the turban slightly, tilting it up just a little. Together they stepped out to join the celebration where she was introduced to the whole community, the groom's cousins and uncles, neighbors, people from the mosque and so on. Only Aissatou's side of the family was missing, too shocked by the recent news of the girl's sudden change in lifestyle.

There were lots of traditional dances, that made Aissatou feel a bit at unease.

Everyone was impressed by the beauty and attitude of the bride, even though they made repeated concerned comments on her skinny frame. Surely a wealthy man like her groom should provide for her better.



As a married woman, Aissatou's lifestyle changed considerably. A few months later, during Eid, she was encouraged to cook for her husband, and the women of the family helped her massively to learn more about traditional recipes.

Eventually, Aissatou started eating more. Partially it was a side effect of being in the kitchen around food for many hours a day, partially she felt a need to conform to the body standards of the women around her. Abdoulaye had also been complaining about how she had no ass and that wedding pictures had been taken already.

She was also used to wearing African fashion on a regular fashion by then.



The changes came faster than she thought they would.

Aissatou gained weight steadily, almost without noticing it at first. Her body softened, her hips rounding slightly, her figure losing its sharp edges. She felt it in small ways: the way her clothes sat differently on her, the way she moved, her gestures, something she had unconsciously picked up from the women around her.

One evening, she paused in front of the mirror a little longer than usual. Her face was fuller, softer. By then, she had fully adopted their style of dress. It all felt natural now.



Meanwhile, Aminata was moving in the opposite direction.

After throwing herself into a more carefree, social life: late nights, parties, new circles, she began to feel a different kind of pressure.

Her weight became something she thought about constantly. At first it was just a passing concern. Then it settled in, quietly, until it shaped her days. It obsessed her and, instead of appreciating her own feminine curves, she now saw them as excessive, something to control, to refine. So she acted on it. First she started by dieting, ditching traditional calories-rich dishes for salads and protein shakes. She occasionally hit the gym.

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Then she hired a personal trainer. Found a dietitian. Followed plans with a discipline she hadn't shown in a long time, not in that sense at least. The change came quickly.

Morning workouts, strict meals, careful tracking—her routine tightened around her, leaving little room for anything else. Within a few months, her body had shifted noticeably. Leaner. Sharper. More defined.

Having adopted Anja's old mindset and her obsession with fitness, she had quickly turned into a sort of gym rat. Not that it bothered her. If anything, she wondered why it had taken so long for her to unlock her full potential.



One evening, standing in front of the mirror after a workout, she turned slightly to the side, studying her reflection. She had started rewarding herself for her efforts by buying herself expensive outfits she could now wear to show off her new body.

Her waist looked tighter. Her arms skinnier and yet more toned. She placed a hand lightly on her chest, noticing the change there too.

"I might have lost a cup size," she said to herself, almost casually "...or two...".

She paused, then gave a small, satisfied smile.

"But I look ten times better like this."



Meanwhile, Aissatou's body was changing too, though not as quickly as her husband would have liked. Several months had passed, but after the initial weight gain, things had slowed down. Her skinny genes were fighting back the large amount of calories. "It's just how I am," she explained. "Everyone in my family is like this. We don't really gain weight." Her husband wasn't convinced. "You're not eating enough, if you want to look like a proper woman, you need to eat more, or you'll make me regret I dumped Aminata!" - he told her, starting to miss the Black girl's curves. Aissatou felt ashamed of herself for her lack of curves and decided to ditch her modest clothes in favor of softer, more revealing garments when in private with her man.



It wasn't that nothing had changed. In fact, there were small differences he wasn't entirely displeased with, to be fair. Her face had acquired a certain feminine roundness and her breasts had gained a couple of cup sized, with the help of the right push-up bra and more generous garments than those she usually wore. Her hips were also developing nicely and for the first time his white wife was showing the first signs of a butt. Aissatou also realized how her fuller figure only made her more attractive, as if she had been born with the right features to be a curvy beauty, so she leaned into it.

But not all the changes were easy to accept.



Her body began to show small signs of strain. The skin on her thighs was no longer as smooth as it once had been, faint signs of cellulites appearing where there had only been firmness before. Her breasts, heavier now, started sagging just like those of many African ladies she saw at the market.

Those were the moments when doubt crept in.

And when it did, her thoughts would drift, almost automatically, to Aminata, that fat cow without charm, and told herself to be better than her.

None of those dramatic changes were visible under the modest outfits she wore for most of the time anyway.



The only visible changes were her mood swings and different posture, more mature, matronly.

Aissatou felt tired, she missed exercise but she had grown used to asking for her husband's permission before leaving the house, and more often than not, she chose not to insist. Anyway, she did her best to be a good wife and carried on. One day, however, her efforts were noticed by Abdulaye's family. After a long day in the kitchen, Abdoulaye called her into the living room. A few members of his family were already seated there, watching her with quiet attention.

"We are impressed with the steps you've taken to fit in more."



"It's not easy, what you've done. So we want to reward you!" - her husband said.

"Really, how?" Aissatou asked, a hint of curiosity in her voice.

Abdoulaye glanced toward the door, a faint smile forming. "You'll see."

There was a knock. Aissatou instinctively adjusted her dress, smoothing the fabric over her hips. She was relieved she had changed out of the lighter robe she sometimes wore at home. At least now she looked proper—covered, presentable.

The door opened, and a young Black woman stepped inside. Aissatou froze for a brief moment.



She didn't recognize her immediately. Aminata. She looked different. Slimmer than before, more toned, confident. Her clothes were modern, fitted—nothing like the flowing garments Aissatou had grown used to.

"Hey beautiful! Sorry to drop in like this, but your husband asked me to come. He has... an idea. Apparently, we could... swap our passports."

Aissatou blinked, unsure she had heard correctly. "Swap...?"

"So that I could leave this shithole country," Aminata continued bluntly. "And you wouldn't be bothered, I guess." Aissatou looked at Abdoulaye, searching his face. He leaned forward slightly, his expression serious now.



"You need to understand what this means," he said calmly. "You would be trading one of the most powerful passports in the world for one that would severely limit your ability to ever leave this country."

Aissatou said nothing. "In fact," he added, "you would only be able to travel visa-free to a handful of other African countries."

"I... don't mind" Aissatou said at last, her voice quiet. "It's fine. I don't need to leave this town... let alone the country." She lifted her chin slightly, trying to sound more certain than she felt. "It would actually make things easier for me here. As a Guinean woman." Her eyes flicked briefly toward Aminata.

"And if that means helping this fat cow to leave for good, I'll be happy to help her!"



"Look at yourself," she replied. "And then look at me." She turned slightly, just enough to emphasize her flat stomach. "Who's the 'fat cow' now?" Aissatou's cheeks turned red. "Girl, you've really let yourself go, huh? Maybe you could use some of my old outfits, huh?" Something snapped in Aissatou. "I want you deported from Guinea, never to return!". Aminata replied lightly: "Relax" - almost amused. "The world is my oyster. I'll be fine!"

"Enough! Please behave like ladies!" - Abdoulaye said, tired of the drama. "Let's move to the living room, I'll get the papers and we'll get this done. Aissatou, please serve her some tea, and show her your old outfits! That's actually a good idea, you two could trade clothes now."



"Of course. Follow me Aminata" - said Aissatou, fuming.

"Cute name, by the way! I go by Mina now love". Mina started changing and trying the new clothes right in front of Aissatou "Are you insane? My man could walk in here!" "He'll see something fine for once " laughed Mina, subtly lifting up the shirt to reveal a 6 pack. Aissatou's jaw tightened: "Shameless western whore!", but on the inside she was thinking "How did she get so toned with abs and all while still keeping curves in the right places?"

Indeed, Mina looked fabulous in Anja's old outfit. "Hmm, I think I'll take them, they're the right size for me!"



"By the way, congrats! How long have you been expecting?" - she said mocking the other woman's curvy body, knowing well it was just fat. But the so called pious Aissatou bought into this lie rather than accepting the shame "Yes I am..." - Abdoulaye interrupted the painful conversation, after a generous look at Mina's exposed midriff. The forms had already been prepared. The ink faint in places—typed on an old machine by someone who had done this many times before. "Just sign here and you'll be officially German and Guinean!". The two women apposed their signatures to the forms. "I'll bring your clothes by later" Mina said, almost as an afterthought "I'll probably leave the country in a few weeks".