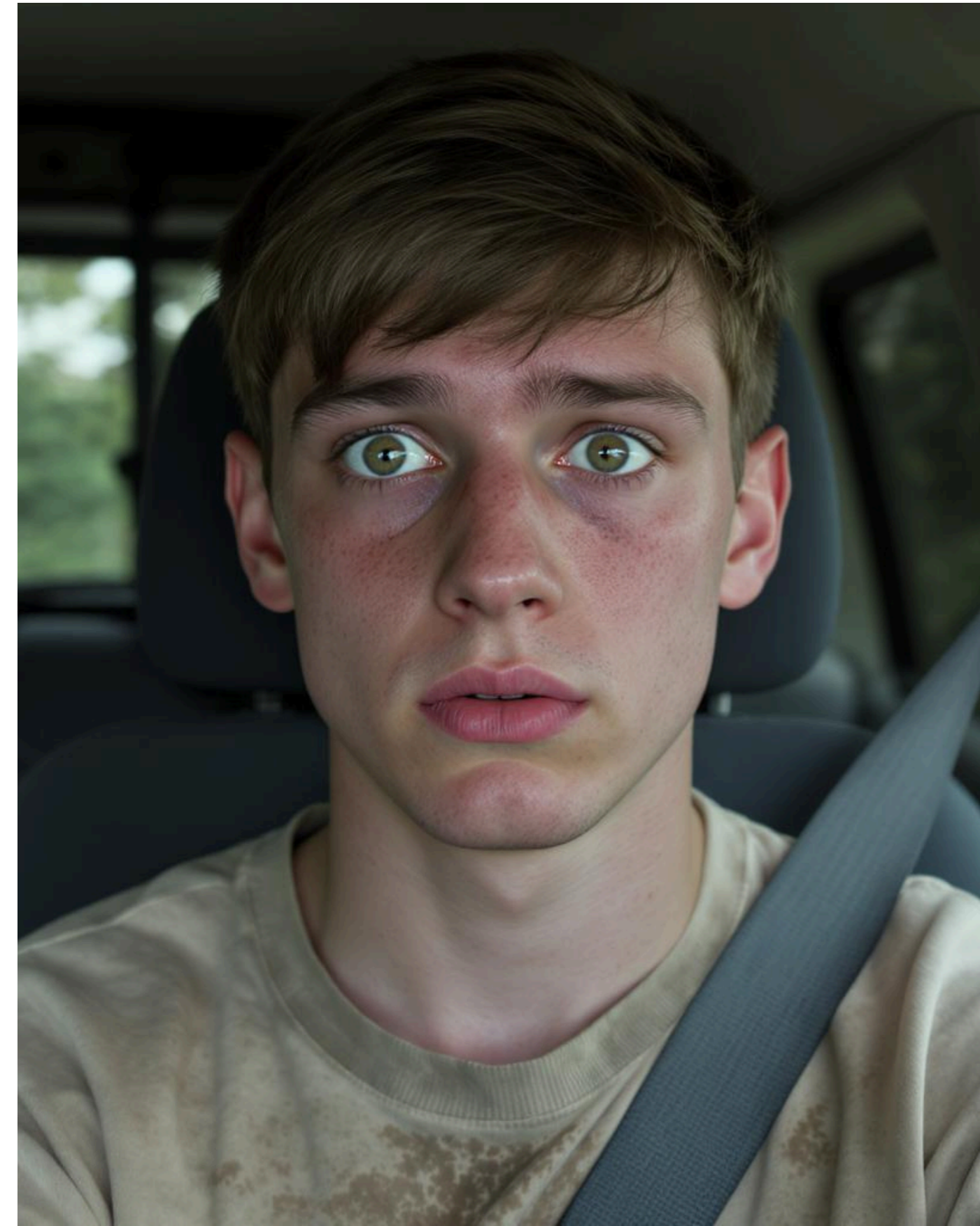


Pride month

JUNE 2025



Meeting your in-laws for the first time is always nerve-wrecking.

When you're a gay man and your boyfriend comes from a conservative Arab family, it's something else entirely. We met in London in college two years before. We were both 22.

Dahwood told me they tried conversion therapy on him, prayed over him, but failed. "But they've changed," he told me, his voice hopeful. "They want to meet you now. Properly." So I flew to Oman. I rented a truck and drove me into the mountains. Their mansion was large but oddly silent.

I was asked to wash, then shown to a small room. On the bed was a white dress, a long, flowing garment. I laughed nervously. "Is this a joke?" Nobody answered.

When I stepped out, wearing it, Dahwood's father looked me over slowly.



"Benjamin," he said with a tired smile. "We understand our son loves you. And we are willing to accept you. But we cannot accept a distortion."

I frowned. "A distortion?" "Dahwood always loved delicate things," his mother sighed. "But a man needs a wife. Children. Not... this." Her dark eyes met mine, almost pitying. "This is why we decided to mold you into something more... *appropriate*."

Then the nurses came in. The needle glinted. "Don't look so afraid," his father chided as they pinned me. "This is a mercy." The needle bit. Cold spread through my veins. I cried out, trying to twist free. They shook their heads: "You'll thank us. And he'll still love you. Even more, perhaps. And no one will whisper anymore." about his tastes anymore."



The mood swings came first. Sudden waves of sadness, anger, helplessness—like someone else had moved into my body and started tugging on the strings. I lost interest in sex, even the thought of it. Then my body betrayed me.

No matter how many push-ups I did, my muscles melted away, leaving my arms soft. My skin turned smooth, the rough stubble of my jawline vanishing.

Within a month or two, my chest ached, swollen and tender. Small buds formed, then grew into full, pale breasts that strained against the feminine outfits they kept forcing me to wear. My hips widened. I knew what was happening. I had trans friends. I recognized the signs—the T-blockers, the estrogen. I was undergoing hormone replacement therapy. I didn't have mirrors in my wing of the mansion but I could imagine my face was changing too.



As the months went on, my skin grew softer, my scent floral, like that of a girl. My male parts had shrunk alarmingly. My nipples, though, ached at the slightest brush of fabric, which prompted me to wear bras. Mood swings became a part of my personality. I cried so often it became a daily habit. Months of estrogen had carved me out from the inside.

I began spending more time with Dahwood's sisters. His mother too. I didn't want to. But I needed someone. They taught me Arabic, how to tie a headscarf, how to shape my eyeliner to lift my eyes. I grew a strong emotional bond with them, I can't even explain why. They were gentle, in a strange, controlling way. I started picking up their mannerisms without realizing. They started calling me a different name. Baasima. I hated it at first. Then I stopped correcting them.



Then, one sweltering morning, they said I was ready. They drove me to a private salon—not a public one, of course. This place had mirrored walls, expensive lighting. I hadn't seen my full reflection in months, and now I was surrounded by it.

The stylist—a young woman—was the first external person I had met in months. Did she know? Should I have told her I had been feminized against my will? No, she would 100% report it to my captors. She probably worked with them and knew all of this. She started working on my hair.

“*Sit still* - اجلس ساكناً” she chided, in Arabic, and I snapped back without thinking, vicious as a cornered cat. “أنا آسف - Sorry” - I replied. She didn't flinch. Just raised a brow and said, “*You're trans, yes?*” My voice, still deep, gave it away. “Yes” - I confessed.



"You already look prettier than most girls born that way." she said, brushing out my hair. Simple. Casual.

The words stung. Not because they were cruel, but because they were kind.

I hated her for saying it. For meaning it. I hated the slow comfort building between us—feminine, quiet, involuntary.

She dyed my hair black, straightened it, and styled it into a bob. Then she plucked my brows into delicate arches. The woman complimented me on my new look. *"There,"* she said, tilting my chin toward the mirror. *"Now you look like a Spanish actress."*

I thanked her but then I added *"Wait, what?"* - I finally checked my reflection in the mirror and gasped at what I saw.



Over the months my skin had gotten not only smoother and my freckles had vanished but also a slightly darker undertone. The kind of complexion you might call “golden” in a polite compliment. Mediterranean. And my eyes—still green, but deeper now, darker. Almost hazel. The black hair made it all more obvious. I could see clearly now that I saw myself in better light conditions. What the hell was going on?

And there was more. “What the hell,” I whispered to myself, studying the stranger in the mirror. I looked younger. I wasn’t sure how—maybe the skin texture, maybe the softness around the jaw—but a good five years were gone from my face. I had been handsome once. Broad-shouldered. Sharp-jawed. A man who turned heads in gay bars. Now I was cute, feminine, soft. *Aesthetically pleasant, sure, but Definitely not what Dahwood had fallen for.*



The salon visits became routine. But the most humiliating part was the tanning.

They didn't call it that, of course. They said it was to "improve my complexion." A euphemism. Like everything else.

The bed hummed with a mechanical warmth, buzzing like bees trapped behind plastic. Twenty minutes a day. That was the schedule.

Each time, my skin crept a shade deeper. The glow moved from peach to bronze. From bronze to gold. Then to something that could only be described as Levantine.

There was nothing accidental about it.

It was pretty clear that they were turning me into a middle eastern beauty.



No natural tan would've done this. Not this depth. Not this smooth, even golden skin tone. I used to burn after fifteen minutes on a beach in Valencia. Lobster-red.

Something fishy was going on. Maybe the hormones had something to do with that?

I finally confronted them. My in-laws, calm and collected as always, didn't even try to deny it. "We've added a DNA agent to your supplements," his father explained softly, as if he were confessing to sweetening tea. "Just small tweaks. A few markers. Skin tone, melanin production. Facial structure. Things that might help with... belonging."

I wanted to scream. But I didn't. I just nodded. Nothing would surprise me anymore at that point.

Then came the final step. My eyes.



"*Keratopigmentation*," the eye doctor explained, adjusting his headlamp. "The color change is permanent and will look absolutely natural" the doctor said, donning latex gloves. "No health risks. It's purely cosmetic."

I shook my head. "I don't get it, my eyes were already darkening. I thought it was the hormones but it turned out to be a genetic change. Why this procedure?"

"This is about security" he interrupted. "Iris scans are precise. No one must recognize who you were."

Of course, they didn't me to ever be able I was actually a white man.

They pinned me back. Plastic clamps. The high-pitched whine of the laser. The pain was not sharp, but intense. Like acid beneath the skin.



A smooth laser procedure also improved my eyesight. I had been nearsighted since I was twelve. I had been wearing contact lenses non-stop over the last few years. Now I wouldn't have time to do that any longer. After the eye procedure, they slipped an old pair of glasses onto my nose, just to test. The ones I used to wear for long hours in front of screens. They gave me a headache now. Just wearing them for five minutes made me nauseous.

I bit my lip. Then, I looked up. Blinking past the glasses. There she was again, in the mirror. Baasima, now convincingly middle Eastern. Her green eyes were gone. Now they were soft brown, syrupy, without the sharp contrast I once clung to. They looked very natural with my new complexion. Nothing left of Ben remained at this point.



My in-laws called my family. Told them I'd decided to stay. That Oman suited me. That I was freelancing now. They must've believed it.

When I finally spoke to my mother, her voice cracked from joy. "You sound different," she said, almost laughing. "Are you alright?" I swallowed hard. "It's the AC," I lied. "Bit of a cold."

She was so relieved. I didn't have the heart to tell her.

My voice was still low. The one last thing that felt real. But something had shifted. I didn't sound gay before. Now I did: warm, breathier. Softer around the edges. More feminine. I didn't mean to talk that way. It just happened. "I've got to go now," I told her quickly, before my throat tightened. "Love you, Mum." Then I heard it behind me—his mother's voice, low and satisfied: "Good girl. Now we'll have to do something with that voice."



The vocal feminization surgery left my throat raw and burning, as if I'd swallowed crushed glass. When I first tried to speak, the sound that emerged was a high, breathy flutter, like a teenage girl whispering secrets.

"No straining," the surgeon warned, shining a light down my swollen trachea. *"Your cords need rest. We'll keep you overnight for observation."*

Outside, the call to prayer echoed through the hospital walls. Somewhere in the city, my old voice still existed—in Dahwood's memories, in the angry messages I'd left before they took my phone. My voice wouldn't match those recon's any longer now.



I woke up suddenly in the dark, groggy and parched, the room faintly humming with machinery. I was had clearly been sedated. Why? The drugs hadn't fully worn off, but something had pulled me back—an ache, dull and hot, deep in my pelvis.

I shifted under the sheets. The sensation sharpened: a low burn between my legs, strange and foreign. I reached down instinctively, hands trembling. Bandages. Thick, tight, sterile. And beneath them... nothing. No bulge. Just smoothness. My fingers recoiled. Panic stirred in my chest. In the silence, I heard a nurse's shoes pass in the hallway. I screamed for help in my new voice—raw, high, unfamiliar.



The nurse arrived quickly, calm and practiced. She pressed something into my IV. "Shh," she murmured, brushing a strand of black hair from my forehead. "It's alright. Everything went smoothly. We'll change the dressings tomorrow. You've got a beautiful result. Congratulations."

"Result?" My voice cracked—soft, unfamiliar, girlish. "What's the meaning of this? Did you remove my... my test—"

She smiled, checking the chart. "Baasima, right? Let's see... full gender-affirming bottom surgery, like requested. Orchiectomy, vaginoplasty, ovaries and uterus implant. Excellent progress, really."



I nearly fainted. I tried to breathe regularly, trying not to cry. Whatever they'd done, it was done. And it was permanent.

My voice was gone. And now this. My anatomy was 100% female. I had been the active partner in the couple. Now, the idea of being with a man - Dahwood or any other man - as the woman was mortifying.

The nurse kept talking, her voice soft and rehearsed.

"You'll need to start dilation in a few days. We'll show you how. It's important to keep the canal open, especially in the first months. Twice a day at first, then we taper off..."



But I wasn't listening anymore. Her words blurred into the low hum of the machines. My gaze drifted to the ceiling tiles, tracing the tiny cracks in the plaster like they might offer answers.

Dilation. It all sounded like maintenance instructions for a body that wasn't mine.

I stared at the pale wall across from me, but I wasn't really seeing it. All I could think was: Not long ago, I was Benjamin, a man. And now? What was left of him? My organs had already been incinerated. My bloodstream flooded with female hormones, my growing breasts sensitive against the fabric, soft dark hair tickled my cheeks. No matter what I did now, I was stuck as a brown girl.



It was too much. I started weeping, quietly at first—just a slow leak of breath, then soft, broken sobs that came in uneven waves.

The nurse hesitated, her hand lingering on the doorframe. For a moment, I thought she might say something. I was a out to reveal her everything, how I had been forced into all of these procedures. But she only gave me one last glance before stepping out and sealing me inside with the quiet click of the latch.

I was alone.

I stared at my dainty brown hands. I truly understood trans people now. I was a man trapped in a woman's body.



The following morning, my in-laws came to visit. I wanted to turn away, to hide beneath the thin hospital blanket, but instead I sat upright.

I hated them. I hated what they had done to me. And yet— *God help me*—some broken piece of me was glad to see them, as if they were family.

Dahwood's mother smiled. "You're radiant, habibti, you've come so far. You're a blessing to this family." I fought against it but I smiled faintly. His father remained at the foot of the bed. "What you were was an aberration. But this..." he said flatly. "This is proper." I didn't speak. I couldn't bear for them to hear my new girly voice. My mutilated male ego was hard to die.



One of Dahwood's cousins, a kind girl named Aaliyah, taught me how to do my makeup. We had the same complexion, so I could borrow her concealer. It started as just something to pass the time during my post-op recovery, but I got pretty good at it.

I don't know if they realized it, but sitting in front of that mirror, applying makeup like any other young woman, did something to me. Something subtle and deep. I started seeing myself as a pretty Arab girl. I guess it was a coping mechanism to avoid losing my head.

When they invited me to go shopping with the girls, my heart fluttered with happiness. And that scared me. What was I becoming? Was I letting them win? But I didn't have the strength to resist anymore.



First stop was a beautician. She did my nails—soft pink, elegant, feminine. Then she plucked my eyebrows to give them definition and touched up my makeup. I looked so pretty. Too pretty. The other girls complimented me on my look.

I blushed, unsure how to handle the warmth their praise sparked in me. It felt good. Too good. I loved feeling like I belonged with them. Like I fit. Like I was one of them.

This was deeply wrong but I stopped caring and went with the flow. I needed to feel good for a while.

Our next stop was a clothing shop.



I tried on a white crop top with a miniskirt—not too short, but enough to turn heads. I could feel the eyes on me, especially from the men. Some whistles too. Some of the girls noticed that, and it didn't sit well with them. They weren't used to being the ones ignored. Inaya, one of the meaner ones, finally snapped. "You're still a man," she sneered. "Benjamin."

My dead name hit like a slap. But strangely, I felt something rise inside me—something surprisingly feminine. "No," I said. "I'm a woman now. And call me Baasima." Inaya's eyes softened. Aaliyah looked almost emotional, like she'd been waiting to hear that. I stammered trying to take it back but it was too late.



Inaya scoffed. “Well then, Baasima,” she said with mock sweetness, “Maybe dress like a lady then, not like a slut trying to catch men. Your future husband won’t be too happy.” “What do you mean?” I asked, confused. I looked down at my outfit. It was pretty tame, really.

Inaya raised an eyebrow, her tone cool. “Why don’t you wear something more... modest?” she said, pulling an abaya from the rack and holding it up between us. “Dahwood’s family is very conservative. They wouldn’t want to see you dressed like that...”

Before I could answer, Aaliyah stepped in. “You don’t have to wear that,” she said firmly, her voice calm but steady.



“We all wear miniskirts if we feel like it. Don’t let her guilt you into something you’re not ready for.”

I looked at the fabric in Inaya’s hands, then at my reflection. I wasn’t sure who I was defending anymore—Benjamin, Baasima, or just the right to decide for myself. I didn’t want to stand out. Not anymore. Maybe covering up was the easier choice, the quieter one. I took the abaya from Inaya’s hand—not proudly, not defiantly, just... tired. “I’ll try it,” I said, almost to myself. I had never worn one before. The fabric felt foreign, slippery against my skin. The shop assistant saw the hesitation in my fingers and stepped forward kindly, helping me drape it properly.



I turned toward the mirror. The girl staring back was draped in pale satin, gold-threaded cuffs shimmering delicately. Behind me, Inaya scoffed. “Look at her, dressing like a grandma,” she said, loud enough for the other girls to hear. When we stepped out, the contrast was immediate. The other girls drew stares, their laughter trailing behind them like. I walked beside them, silent and invisible, a shadow among peacocks.

But when we got home, my in-laws lit up when they saw me. They praised my look. “Look at you, Baasima. You look elegant today.” Inaya gave me a long stare, then smiled—tight and slow. Not kind. She was the lead female of the group, after all.



I was trying on my new abayas at home. That's when Dahwood's mother appeared. "I'm so happy to see you adjusting so well." - she said.

I smiled back. Even I couldn't explain the shift that had taken place in my head lately. Then, she added, "You'll make a wonderful mother for Dahwood's Arab children." I froze. "Wait... what?" I hesitated. "I mean, I've started having periods lately. But that—does that mean I... make eggs? Are my chromosomes even compatible?" She answered, calm. "Yes." "But... wouldn't my kids be mixed?" "No, dear. Your chromosomes... are that of an Arab woman now. Even your blood type changed." This wasn't roleplaying anymore. This was real.



That completely broke me. There was no going back, not in body, not in mind, not even in my DNA. I had been unmade and built again. Whatever Benjamin had been, he was gone now. When the wedding was announced, I didn't fight. I didn't even pretend to hesitate. The current carried me forward, and I let it.

Choosing the dress became a ritual. Aaliyah stayed by my side. In the end, I chose something classic, though not too modest. Gold threads traced delicate vines over ivory, the bodice cut to reveal just enough. The veil was soft, pinned lightly so it draped but didn't hide my hair—my hair, the one thing I'd learned to arrange just so.



As a gay man, I had always admired elegant weddings. Now I was about to live one in the first person, as a beautiful Arab bride. The disgust and humiliation I once felt had dulled, replaced by a quiet acceptance of the role carved out for me.

Back then, I had resisted any pull toward the feminine, clinging to the role of “the masculine one” in the couple. Perhaps that resistance had always been why I felt the need to prove myself. But now there was nothing left to resist. I was expected to indulge, to embody the softness I had once denied.

What a crazy ride, I thought, entering the car taking me to the wedding venue. I might as well enjoy it.



And against all reason, a strange warmth stirred in me. I felt almost happy at the thought of marrying Dahwood. I only prayed he too had been changed somehow—that he had been turned straight. Even if that was wrong. Even if it went against everything I once stood for.

I had marched in Pride, shouted in the streets, worn the colors and believed in them. I had been outspoken, defiant, proud. Now I was walking toward something entirely different: a life as a straight wife. The thought still unsettled me. It pressed against everything I used to believe, everything I used to fight for.



Looking down, my brown orbs reminded me, with a quiet cruelty, that I was now a young brown woman. And a straight one at that. If possible I now desired men even more. An element of penis envy now seemed to creep in my thoughts when I thought about men.

And then I saw him. Dahwood.

My chest tightened, my breath stalling as if the air itself had caught. I hadn't seen him in months, not since before Baasima had replaced Benjamin. A part of me had dreaded this moment, terrified of how he would look at me now... of whether he would recognize me at all.

I barely recognized him.



His thick hair was gone, his head shaved clean but for a faint stubble. A full black beard framed his face, sharper, more masculine than I remembered. "What have they done to you, habibi?" - he asked me.

He stepped closer, his eyes wide, and I forced a shaky smile. "I'm your wifey now," I said, my new voice soft and lilting. The sound of it startled even me, light and unmistakably feminine. His hand lingered on mine, hesitant. "Oh my God..." he breathed. "I saw pictures, but you... you sound so different. And you smell..." He leaned in, almost dazed. "...you smell different too." For a moment, it was as if we were both strangers dressed for someone else's wedding. Then we left to greet the guests - it was too early to kiss in public.



I moved among the guests as a bride should—smiling, offering polite words, lowering my eyes at compliments.

Hytham was there too. Dahwood's brother. He had always looked hot, broad-shouldered, tall, confident. Back when I was a man, I had noticed him, but he was straight. A notorious womanizer. Off limits.

Now though... I felt the betrayal of my own body. My nipples tightened beneath the fabric, a shiver running low through me. I couldn't pull my eyes away. My brown eyes stared with an intensity he noticed. His mouth twitched in the faintest smile. I looked down quickly, feigning modesty. "Welcome to the family" - he told me with a charming smile.