

Curse



Mark and his girlfriend Lauren were rich. Ok, filthy rich. And young. And pretty. They had it all. Lauren was a cellist for a renowned orchestra, and Mark worked in finance.

They were engaged in every way that mattered – though not yet officially. Mark had the ring hidden away and the perfect proposal planned for very soon. Their families and friends could feel it coming. Lauren could feel it too. On that day, she really had the feeling something special could happen.

They felt like having a relaxing day at the park, so they drove there with Mark's Porsche Panamera and walked around casually, looking for a good spot for a picnic, feeling relaxed.

The afternoon sun filtered through the trees of the upscale park, casting long shadows across the manicured lawns. Mark squeezed his girlfriend Lauren's hand a little tighter. She looked perfect as always – long blonde hair flowing freely, tight crop top hugging her figure, expensive sandals clicking on the path. They were the kind of couple who belonged here: successful, attractive, unapologetically living the life they'd earned. That's when they noticed her.

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A pretty Muslim woman with large brown eyes and brown skin was sitting gracefully on a wooden bench just ahead, wearing a flowing royal-blue dress adorned with intricate gold embroidery that caught the sunlight. A black hijab framed her face beautifully. She looked serene, almost regal. A few hijabs and abaya dresses were lying down on the bench. Neither Mark nor Lauren were particularly hateful towards minorities, but they were conservative and had lots of prejudices against Muslims. So when she talked to them, they weren't particularly pleased.

As Mark and Lauren passed, the woman looked up and offered a gentle, warm smile.

"Excuse me," she said softly, her voice carrying a pleasant exotic accent. "Would you both be open to hearing a little about our culture? It might bring some peace into your lives." She tilted her head slightly, still smiling. "I couldn't help noticing your girlfriend. She has such graceful, elegant features... mashAllah. She would make a truly beautiful Muslimah. The hijab would suit her perfectly. Would you like to try one? I have many colors."



Mark stopped dead in his tracks. Lauren's mouth fell open in disbelief.

"Excuse me?" Lauren snapped, her voice rising sharply. "Did you just tell me how to dress?"

Mark immediately stepped forward, positioning himself slightly in front of her, his protective instincts kicking in. "Are you serious right now?" he snarled. "You don't get to tell my girlfriend how to dress. Who the hell do you think you are? Another one trying to shove your religion down our throats. We don't want your religion, your culture, your hijabs, or your lectures. Go back to wherever you came from and leave us alone." Lauren tried stopping him but it was too late. Lauren tugged at his sleeve. "Mark, come on..."

The woman in the blue dress and black hijab didn't flinch. Her expression remained calm, almost pitying. She looked at them both for a long moment, and whispered a short, melodic phrase in Arabic. Then she smiled again, soft, knowing, and strangely kind. "May you find what you truly need." With that, she stood and walked away, her steps graceful and surprisingly quick. Lauren hesitated, a flicker of regret crossing her face.

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"Wait... I'm sorry, we didn't—" she started, but the woman was already disappearing down the path. Mark scoffed and turned away. "Don't apologize to her. She started it." Lauren shot him an annoyed look but followed anyway, her earlier relaxed mood completely shattered. Lauren's blood was still boiling as she stormed ahead along the grassy path, her long blonde hair swaying with every angry step. The park suddenly felt too warm, too crowded. She needed air. She needed space.

Had she overreacted? The thought crept in unwanted. The woman had been polite... almost kind. But no – she had no right to comment on how Lauren dressed or suggest she'd look better in a hijab. That was crossing the line.

"Can you believe that bitch?" she hissed, not even turning to look at Mark, half-trying to convince herself. "Telling me I'd look good in a hijab? Like I need fashion advice from someone dressed like it's the seventh century. The nerve!"

She clenched her fists tightly. Deep down, a small voice nagged at her. *Mark can be so aggressive sometimes... but I started it, didn't I? I snapped at her first. Her face was twisted in irritation.*

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Mark was a few steps behind, also fuming. “Fucking unbelievable. These people think they can just –”

A strange warmth spread across his skin. He slowed his steps, blinking rapidly. The anger was still there, but now it was mixed with a dizzy, disorienting fog. Mark suddenly stumbled. He looked down at himself in shock as his expensive navy t-shirt and jeans began to ripple and shift like liquid fabric. The material lightened, stretched, and reformed into a long, flowing white thobe that reached down to his ankles.

“Wait... what the hell?” He muttered, touching the garment.

At the same time, an intense itching spread across his jaw and cheeks. Mark scratched at his face frantically and felt thick, dark stubble pushing through at an unnatural speed. Within moments, a full, well-groomed beard had formed – neatly trimmed yet noticeably fuller and darker than anything he’d ever had before. He ran his fingers through it in disbelief, eyes wide. “What is this?!” he growled, his voice slightly deeper.

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He looked up at Lauren, now dressed in a modest royal-blue long-sleeved top and fitted blue jeans that covered her completely. Her tiny white crop top and short Gucci skirt were gone. The new outfit was elegant but far more conservative.

Lauren stared down at herself, realizing the change in that very moment hands running over the soft blue fabric in panic. "Oh my God... my clothes! Mark, what the fuck is happening?! Has she cursed us?" she cried. She spun around desperately, searching for the woman in the hijab. "Wait! We're sorry! We didn't mean it like that! Come back! I'm sorry, okay?! We were rude! I was rude! Please stop this!" But the woman was gone. Lauren staggered forward on the grass, arms outstretched in disbelief as the changes accelerated. "No, no, no— please God, no!"

Lauren still had her long blonde hair and striking features, but everything else felt wrong. She staggered a few steps forward on the grass, her arms held out in disbelief as she stared down at her changing body. The fitted blue jeans and long-sleeved top she had just been wearing began to move on their own. The fabric shimmered, stretched, and flowed seamlessly together at her waist, merging into one elegant, floor-length garment.

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The modest blue outfit transformed into a beautiful, flowing abaya that hugged her figure modestly yet gracefully. At the same time, a warm tingling spread across her face and arms. Her once fair, porcelain complexion began to deepen rapidly shifting from pale European tones to a smooth, warm olive skin with a natural golden undertone that showed on her hands and feet. She also noticed her long blonde hair darkening, the color bleeding downward until it became a uniform, glossy jet black that cascaded over her shoulders and down her back.

“Nooo! My hair! Stop! Oh God, please stop!” she screamed, clutching fistfuls of her transforming locks. “She’s turning us into... them! I don’t want this! I don’t want to be one of them! Please, I’m sorry! We’re both so sorry! Take it back – I’ll never say anything like that again, I swear!” Her voice shifting, now softer, more melodic, and feminine, with a warm, velvety tone and a gentle Arabic lilt.

She touched her face, feeling the new warmth and smoothness of her transformed skin. Mark stood a few feet away in his white thobe, still stroking his thick new beard in horror. His own skin had begun to darken as well, taking on a similar Middle Eastern tone.

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He looked at Lauren and felt a wave of panic crash over him. The flowing blue abaya now felt perfectly fitted, modest, and elegant on her new curvaceous figure and golden-olive skin.

Another wave of heat washed over Mark. His neatly styled light brown hair began to thin, then fell away in soft strands that dissolved into nothing. Within seconds, his scalp was completely smooth and bald, gleaming under the afternoon sun. "Nooo fuck nooo! I'm fucking bald? How is this possible?" He stared at Lauren with wide, disbelieving eyes, one hand still pressed against his freshly bald head. His face and neck continued to darken, the pale European tone shifting into a warm, sun-kissed olive complexion that matched and overtook Lauren's new exotic tone. His thick, dark beard now sat prominently on his transformed face – full, well-groomed. "No... no, this isn't happening," he stammered, his voice now carrying a clear Arabic accent.

Lauren turned toward him, realizing the full extent of his transformation. "Aaah! Who the fuck are you?!" She stumbled backward, eyes wide with terror. "Oh my God... Mark?! Is that you?! You're bald... and your face... your skin... Oh God, I can't even look at you like this! I'm sorry babe, but you look like a terrorist."

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Mark's heart dropped. Suddenly becoming bald became the least of his concerns. "Oh yeah?" he shot back. "Well look at you! You look just like her now! Your eyes are brown too, your skin, your hair – God, you're literally her!"

Lauren looked stunned, but before she could respond, her hands flew to her head with a sharp gasp. A soft black hijab materialized around her hair and neck, wrapping snugly and framing her face in modest elegance. Lauren's hands flew to her head as the final piece of her transformation locked into place.

Mark stared at her – now a stunning, fully veiled Muslim woman in the flowing blue abaya and black hijab – and pure dread twisted across his face. Lauren touched the hijab frantically, her voice rising into a panicked scream, her voice more high-pitched now, velvety and guttural.

"Even your voice sounds like hers! This is insane! We have to find her right now! I saw her walking that way!" He spun around and ran desperately toward the parking lot, his white thobe flapping around his legs and slowing him down.



His words resonated in her mind.

"I... I can't live like this! My family, my friends, what will they say? I can't show up looking like this! Fuck, my job... I can't show up looking like an Arab woman! My whole life is over!" - she whispered, voice trembling with a soft Arabic lilt. Her olive-skinned face, now beautifully made-up yet fully framed by the hijab, showed pure panic. She tried breathing slowly. She noticed people were staring at her. Obviously. A middle-Eastern woman in hijab screaming like that with her man caught everybody's attention. She felt a pang of shame, lowered her head and started walking, feeling deeply picking up the abaya dress to avoid stepping on it.

She looked around for the lady who had turned her into her doppelgänger but she could not see her. Deep down, she knew she was gone for good. She noted something on her bench still.

Feeling constrained by her new modest attire, she walked as fast as she could toward the wooden bench where the woman had been sitting. There, lying crumpled on the bench, was a piece of white paper with handwriting in bold black marker. Maybe there was a way out, after all!