

# Hijab day - Swap

FEBRUARY 2026



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 to 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 embroidered 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".