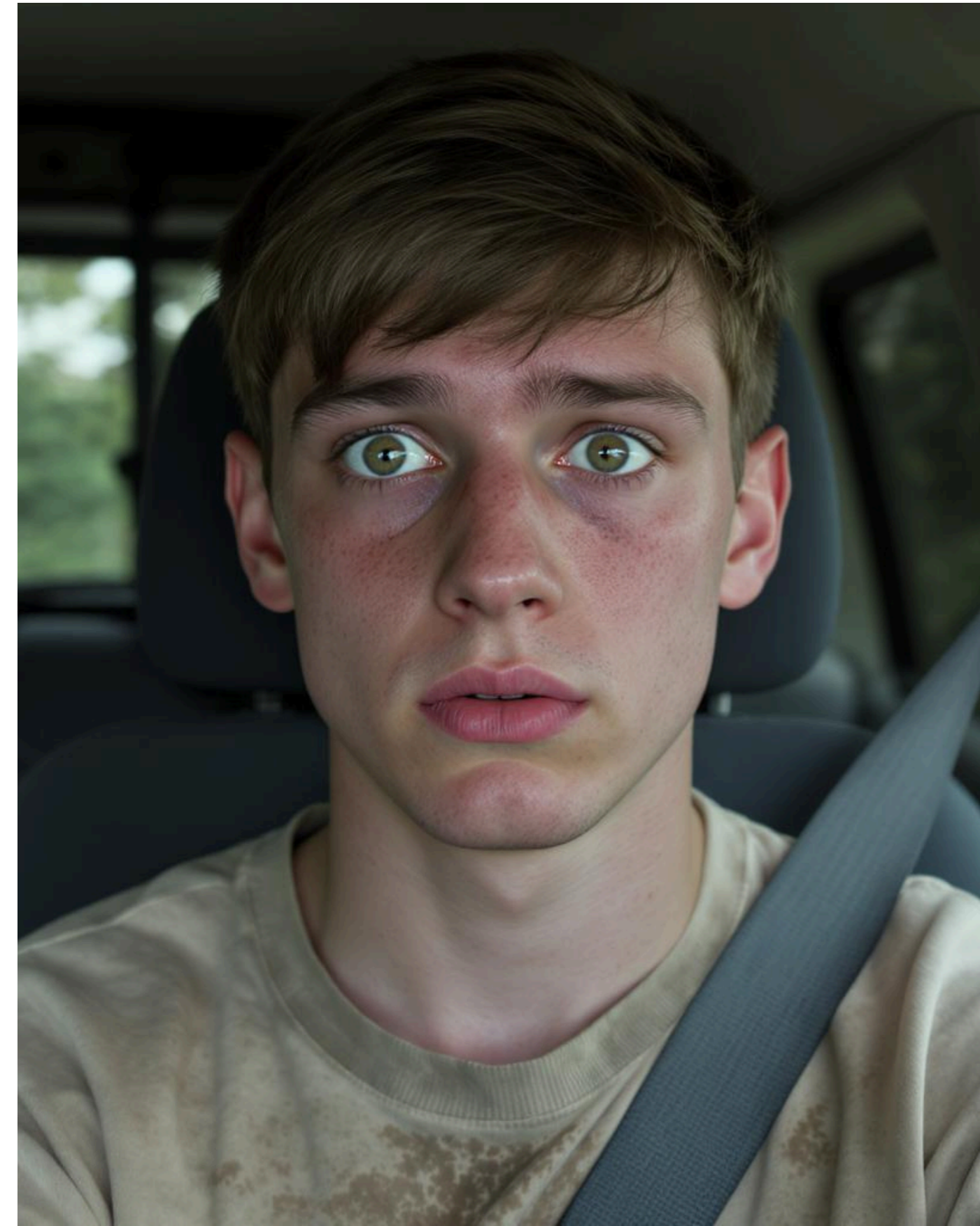


Pride month

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. “*Sorry* - أنا آسف” - 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.