

Black plague

MAY 2026



Larissa had not expected the breakup to hurt so much. For four years, she had grown used to being someone's future wife, even if she had never said it aloud. Then, almost without warning, he was gone. At thirty-one, Larissa told everyone she was taking time for herself. She booked facials, bought new dresses, and pretended that freedom suited her. That evening at the opera house was supposed to be a small act of recovery. Larissa arrived early, took her seat, and opened the program without reading it. For a few minutes, she almost felt calm. Then the door opened. A woman stepped into the box, followed by an older man. They were Black, elegantly dressed, with a quiet confidence that immediately irritated Larissa. Larissa's fingers tightened around the program.

"I'm sorry," she said. "This box is taken." The woman checked her ticket. "Yes. I believe we're sharing it." Larissa gave a small laugh, the kind she used with incompetent staff. "No, I don't think so."

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The woman looked at her for a moment, still polite. "These are our seats." "There must be some mistake," Larissa said. The woman only smiled. "I'm Nadine," she said, extending her hand. "No need for this to be uncomfortable." That was when Larissa finally looked at her. The woman was beautiful in a composed, unbothered way. Larissa hated that most of all. She wanted embarrassment. Deference. Some sign that the woman understood the awkwardness of the situation and would quietly solve it by leaving. Larissa shook her hand quickly. She sat rigidly in her satin gown, furious at the insult, furious at the shared space, furious most of all that Nadine seemed completely untouched by her contempt. She told herself she would complain during the interval. Then the music took over. Wagner first, then Strauss. She thought of herself at sixteen, practicing violin. She thought of dance classes after school. Lost in memories, the applause startled her.

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She rose before Nadine could say anything, for a moment, the two women looked at each other. Her expression was unreadable. Outside, the rain had turned to a fine mist. A taxi was waiting near the curb. Larissa slipped inside with relief, already thinking of the warm bath she would take when she got home. Only when she settled into the back seat did she notice the dampness in her hair. "Typical," she muttered, touching one strand. The rain had loosened its perfect straightness, bringing out a soft wave she did not remember having.

She frowned, smoothing it down with gloved fingers, but the curls sprang back lightly around her face. The driver glanced at her in the mirror.

"Coming back from the opera, miss?"

"Yes," Larissa said, relaxed. "Wagner and Strauss."
"Nice." She gave a faint, arrogant laugh. "Not that you're an expert, I suppose." He did not answer.

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The taxi stopped in front of her building. The rain had grown heavier again. She clicked her tongue, irritated, then opened the door.

She stepped out carefully, one gloved hand on the door, the other holding the side of her satin dress so it would not brush the wet pavement. Her dress clung a little more tightly to her hips than it had earlier in the evening, but she was too cold to notice. She walked toward the entrance of her building. Her hair had become full and wavy now, tumbling over her shoulders in thick black curls that no amount of smoothing could flatten. The opera gloves still covered her arms, hiding the deepening hue of her skin. Her face had changed more openly. Her lips looked fuller, her nose broader, her cheekbones set differently. Larissa did not see any of it. She only felt strangely tired.

At the glass doors, the doorman looked up from his desk. He did not move.

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Larissa waited, one eyebrow raised. When he still only stared, she opened the door herself with her keycard. "Good evening," she said, irritated. The man blinked. "Good evening, madam." "You might try opening the door next time," she muttered. "Yes, of course," he said, still looking uncertain. Probably new, she thought. Weird. She was sure she had seen him before. She did not notice what he had noticed.

Her skin had deepened into a rich brown. Her face had softened and changed. Her hair had shrunk upward into tight curls around her face, thick and natural, no longer the sleek black mane she had styled so carefully. Even her dress clung to her differently now, shorter, tighter around the hips, more alive than elegant. Larissa tugged at it with annoyance. "What the hell" she whispered, noticing her legs looking surprisingly dark through the stockings. It must be the lobby light, she told herself, rushing to her apartment.

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She hurried to her dressing table, but the little mirror there was half in shadow. She saw enough to panic and not enough to understand: dark skin, wide brown eyes, curls, thick lips. Larissa backed away, knocking over a bottle of perfume. It hit the floor and spilled across the rug, sharp and floral. She turned on every light she could reach. The room filled with brightness. For a moment, she kept her eyes closed. Then she opened them. The full-length mirror showed a Black woman in an Africanized version of Larissa's opera dress, with a tight patterned fabric in blue, red, and gold, cut close to the body, shorter than anything Larissa would have chosen for a formal evening. Her gloves still reached past her elbows, absurdly elegant against her dark skin. Her hair had become a halo of tight, natural 4c type curls, rounded and full. Unfortunately she couldn't appreciate the beauty she now embodied, or the elegance of her outfit, shocked as she was by the fact that she was now a Black lady.

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Larissa did not scream.

For a few seconds, she thought she might faint. Her vision narrowed. A dark ring closed around the edges of the room. The chair caught her badly, half sideways, one hand still gripping the edge. The room tilted. The lights around the mirror became too white, too sharp. She tried to breathe through her nose. It did not work. Her eyes went to her arms again, to the dark skin disappearing beneath the black gloves, to the shape of her thighs or her brown cleavage. She touched her hair once more, and the thick curls sprang beneath her fingers, soft, stubborn and real. "This isn't happening," she whispered. But the mirror did not change.

She leaned forward with her elbows on her knees, gasping quietly, afraid that if she passed out she might wake up even further changed, or not wake up as herself at all.

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She was Larissa. She was not some hysterical Black woman. There had to be an explanation. A stroke. A psychotic episode. Poisoning. Something in the champagne at the interval, perhaps.

The idea almost comforted her. "I'm crazy, as simple as that" she said aloud, and for one strange moment that felt like the best possible answer. Certainly better than suddenly waking up up like miss Congo.

"It's ok" - she told herself "I can deal with hallucinations. But I need to see a psychiatrist soon or I'll just lose my fucking mind in the doubt."

There was a psychological clinic three blocks away. She remembered seeing its sign from a taxi once, and laughing at the sort of people who needed it. It was closed then but the following morning she could visit it.

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She took some pills to fall asleep, still dressed since she didn't want to face her reflection. The thought of undressing terrified her more than anything. Seeing her naked body entirely Black would shock her even more. She caught a glimpse of her dark brown vagina going to the toilet and nearly lost it. Maybe a good night of sleep would fix her hallucinating mind, she told herself.

She slept badly, with all sorts of nightmares where she was stuck in a dark molasses, and woke up looking still Black as coal.

She stood too quickly, almost fell, took only her phone, her keys, and the large sunglasses she used in summer when she wanted to avoid being recognized. They covered at least part of the face in the mirror. She left the apartment without changing clothes. In the lift, she kept her head down.

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The doorman looked up when she crossed the lobby again, but this time they said nothing. Larissa walked past him quickly, embarrassed, and stepped back into the cold wet street.

She walked to the clinic, trying to avoid the gaze of men excited by her outfit and figure. She definitely caught more attention now, and that worried her. It was one more sign that she was not hallucinating but indeed looked like a busty Black lady.

After what felt like half a hour, she reached the clinic.

The receptionist looked up when Larissa entered. She was young, blonde, with a white blouse and a soft professional expression that made Larissa feel instantly worse. She hated that look of pity.

"Hello," Larissa said. "Is this the urgent psychological office? Can I talk to a doctor?"

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"Of course. Please, wait a second. In the meantime, can we ask you some questions? What is the issue?" the receptionist asked gently.

"I..." Larissa swallowed. "It's kind of hard to explain."

"That's okay."

"Can I ask you a question instead?"

"Sure."

"How do I look?"

The receptionist paused, choosing her words carefully. "You look very good. Stylish. Attractive. In great shape, to be honest. Is it about body image? Anorexia, maybe? I can contact Dr—"

"No," Larissa cut in. "No, I mean..." Her throat tightened. "My color."

The receptionist blinked. "Your color?"

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She nodded. "My skin color."

The woman looked at her more closely. "Black? Is it a rhetorical question? Harassment? Racism?"

Larissa let out a sound that was almost a sob. "Oh God," she whispered. "I'm not hallucinating then. But I swear I'm a white woman. Or I was."

The receptionist's expression changed. A small shift of worry. A trained face preparing for a delicate conversation. "Okay," she said softly. "Why don't you sit down?"

"No, please listen. I was at the opera. There was this Black lady. African-American, I mean. We argued a little. Not argued, exactly, but..." Larissa stopped, hearing herself. "Anyway, I didn't feel anything. Then in the taxi my hair started curling and I thought it was the rain. I came home and—" Her voice broke. "I looked like this. God, it makes no sense when I say it loud" Larissa said, beginning to shake.

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The receptionist asked, very carefully, "Are you sure you haven't always looked like this?"

Larissa stared at her. The question entered her like cold water. "Of course I'm sure." But even as she said it, something slipped. Was she, really?

"Maybe" she whispered, terrified. "I think..." she said. "I swear I was..." Perhaps she had always been Black. She wasn't so sure now. Perhaps her memories were the broken part. The blonde lady smiled with compassion.

"My memories are all messed up" Larissa said, her voice suddenly small. "That must be it. I must always have been like this. A Black lady. Oh God..."

The receptionist touched her arm, comforting her. Larissa flinched, but did not pull away. She blinked. "What? You..." The receptionist's face changed in front of her.

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The woman's skin deepened from pale to brown. Her blonde ponytail loosened, darkened at the roots, then along its whole length, curling, shrinking against the back of her neck. "Oh my God," the receptionist whispered. "What's happening to me?" Her eyes went wide, no longer blue but a frightened dark brown. Her bone structure went from that of a pretty blonde caucasian woman to those of an unremarkable African American lady. Kinda cute, but unremarkable.

"My hands" she said, staring at them frozen. Larissa stood still, watching. She had clung to the possibility of madness, some cruel collapse of her own mind. But the receptionist was experiencing it too. "You saw that, you became Black like me!" Larissa said, her voice almost gone. The receptionist looked up at her, her new face trembling with terror. "Then it's true," she whispered. "It's really true."

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The receptionist touched her cheek, then her hair, pulling at the curls. "What did you do to me?" she cried. "I didn't do anything!" Larissa explained, noticing nurses running towards them.

The receptionist stared at her, enraged, breathing fast. "And now I'm Black too?" "I'm sorry. I... have been cursed I think." Larissa said. The receptionist leaned on the counter, while Larissa pressed a hand to her mouth.

The nurses quickly took care of the newly Black lady as Larissa managed to leave the hallway, running downstairs.

"Oh my God! Oh my God! That is so fucked up! That old witch must have cursed me so that anyone I touch becomes Black!" - she thought. "My life is over, not only I'm Black, I cannot touch white people or this happens!"

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She left the building in a rush, hoping to escape the woman's wrath, accidentally bumping into a petite white girl leaving the building, throwing her documents all over the place. Her larger breasts and curvier body made her movements clumsy sometimes, as she was still learning to adjust to her new body.

"I'm sorry, I had the craziest day" - Larissa said, apologetic, collecting the sheets from the ground.

The petite girl, who had initially reacting screaming with a squeaky voice, went suddenly silent as Larissa turned around to pick up the paper sheets.

Then she heard a husky, low voice behind her saying: "What da hell? Muh skin! Muh skin!"

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When Larissa turned around, the white girl had mutated into a much taller, thicker yet not particularly busty Black young woman, with loop earrings, a urban outfit.

“Oh my God no! The curse!” - too busy thinking about her previous episode, Larissa had been careless and accidentally changed another person’s life for good.

She quickly apologized, then ran away exploiting the Black girl’s confusion before she started running after her and confronting her. The last thing she wanted was ending up in a physical fight with an angry African American woman.

She took a second to formulate a few hypotheses: was she going to turn any person Black, regardless of their ethnicity? Did it work with men, too? Could it be reversed? So many questions...

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For two days, Larissa tried to behave like a responsible person. She stayed home, ordered groceries without opening the door until the delivery man had left, and wore gloves even while drinking coffee. She told herself she was doing the right thing. No handshakes, no brushes of the arm, no accidents. Nobody else would be dragged into this because of her. But isolation made her restless. By the third day, after staring at herself in the mirror for too long, she decided to go for a walk in the park.

She was stuck as a Black girl with no identity and a curse turning anybody she touched into a Black version of themselves. Maybe she should monetize her superpowers, get in touch with the CIA - she smiled at the pun. Maybe BLM would be interested, too. Then she had a good idea. Her ex. Daniel. He had left her to "find something different." Well. Different had found her first.

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Larissa rushed home and tried on a red sequined dress she never used before, though it fit her new body as if it had been made for it. She took a few selfies and created a Tinder profile under the name Joy. She was sure Daniel would be there. The first profile appeared. She swiped. Another. Another. A divorced architect. A bored consultant. A man holding a fish. Larissa went through hundreds of faces, her thumb moving with cold determination. Every now and then, she paused and wondered whether Daniel was into Black girls. A few days later, she found him. Daniel, thirty-four. Recently single. Looking for something real. To her surprise, the match came almost immediately. Then his message appeared. "Wow. You're stunning." She texted him often, anticipating the thought of him touching her hand across a candlelit table, smiling that familiar smile, and then noticing his skin darken beneath her glove. She liked imagining the confusion in his blue eyes as they turned brown.

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Their first date went smoothy. "You know what," Daniel said over dinner, with a puzzled smile, "it's funny, but you remind me of my ex." "How come?" "I don't know. Your opinions, your taste, some of your expressions. You even hold your glass the same way." He laughed softly, then added, "You don't sound Black, by the way, if I can say so." Larissa felt a small pulse of panic beneath her ribs. "I was adopted," she said quickly, smiling. "I grew up with a white family, so I guess I feel kind of white myself, haha. That's probably why I've mostly dated white guys." Daniel nodded, reassured by the explanation because it was simple enough not to trouble him. Larissa leaned forward, pretending curiosity. "Was your ex white, Black...?" "White. Oh, very white. And honestly, kind of a racist bitch. You don't remind me of her in that regard, don't worry." Larissa almost choked on her wine. "Good," she said, laughing. "Though maybe I'm a bit racist too." Daniel laughed with her.

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Afterward, he messaged her every day, and when he asked for a second date, she suggested a luna park on the edge of the city. She let him buy her cotton candy, stand close enough for his shoulder to nearly brush hers, but she did not touch him. Then, near the end of the date, when the light was waning and Daniel was talking about how nice it was to meet someone “different but familiar,” Larissa reached for his hand. Daniel squeezed back, smiling. “Finally,” he said. “I was starting to think you didn’t like me.” Beneath her fingers, his skin shifted. At first it was only a faint tan across his knuckles, then it deepened, spreading over the back of his hand, up his wrist, under the cuff of his shirt. Larissa watched it happen, her heart beating so hard she felt dizzy. Bingo. “Are you alright?” Daniel asked, still smiling, unaware of the miracle beginning under her glove. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost.” His eyes flicked down at last. The smile faltered. He stared at his hand in hers, then at his reflection in a glass window. “What the hell?” Larissa tilted her head, trying not to laugh.

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His eyes widened in panic as he realized she had somehow done this to him. "Yo—what the fuck—!" - he added, his voice changing accordingly. Larissa smiled. "Careful," she said softly. "You'll draw attention. You don't want to attract the police *now*, do you?" Daniel looked down again, then back at her, and the scream came out of him before he could stop it.

He stumbled backward, hands frantically patting his face, his neck, his kinky short black hair. Then he ran, screaming hoarsely into the evening, as if the devil herself were chasing him. She didn't chase. She simply stood there under the glowing Luna Park lights. A wide, radiant smile broke across her face. Every second of his terror was delicious. Payback complete. Whatever had happened to her, whatever curse had entered her skin at the opera, it had given her this one perfect gift: Daniel, beautiful Daniel, running from himself under carnival lights.

She had spent the first days mourning the woman she had lost, but the grief was gone now.

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Something else was taking its place. A desire to punish people by turning them into what they disliked the most.

By morning, she had a list. Former colleagues first. People from the agency where she had worked briefly after university. The kind of people who said “international buyer” when they meant rich foreigner, and “wrong tone for the neighborhood” when they meant Black or Arab or anything outside their idea of inherited taste. She dressed carefully. A black fitted dress, severe and expensive, with long gloves and a wide straw hat that hid most of her hair. She pinned the curls underneath as best she could. Large sunglasses completed the look. At the real estate office, the receptionist almost stood when she entered. Money still had a scent, Larissa thought, and apparently she still knew how to wear it. “Good morning,” she said, lowering her voice.

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"I'm looking for a property. Something discreet. Large. Historic, if possible." Within minutes, two agents came out to greet her. Then a third. She recognized them all. Sophie, who had once called a Nigerian client "surprisingly refined." Martin, who had joked that certain buyers brought "too many relatives" to viewings. Claire, who had smiled sweetly while advising landlords which applicants would "fit the building culture." None of them recognized Larissa. They saw only a rich Black woman with impeccable posture and an appetite for expensive houses. "Wonderful to meet you," Sophie said, extending her hand. Larissa looked at it for one delicate second, then accepted. Her complexion deepened under the office lights, freckles vanishing into brown skin, her blonde hair darkening at the roots. She blinked, stumbled over a word, then stared at her own wrist. Larissa turned smoothly to Martin. "And you are?" He shook her hand automatically, still looking at Sophie in confusion.

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His pale face warmed, his jaw softened, his hair curled close to his scalp. "What is happening?" Claire whispered. Larissa smiled and offered her hand last. By the time Larissa left, the office was in chaos. Papers scattered, phones rang unanswered, and three former colleagues touching their altered faces, their new skin, their changed hair, trying to explain to the others what no one could say aloud without sounding insane. "Good luck with the neighborhood fit," she said, and stepped out into the morning.

Some weeks later, Larissa walked through the park in a red dress. The dark skin, the full mouth, the shape of her body, all of it had stopped feeling like punishment. This was her now. She smiled to herself as she watched a handsome Black man jog past, accidentally touching her elbow, untouched by the curse because there would be nothing for it to change. Yes, she thought, that was the next step. A Black partner for her new life.