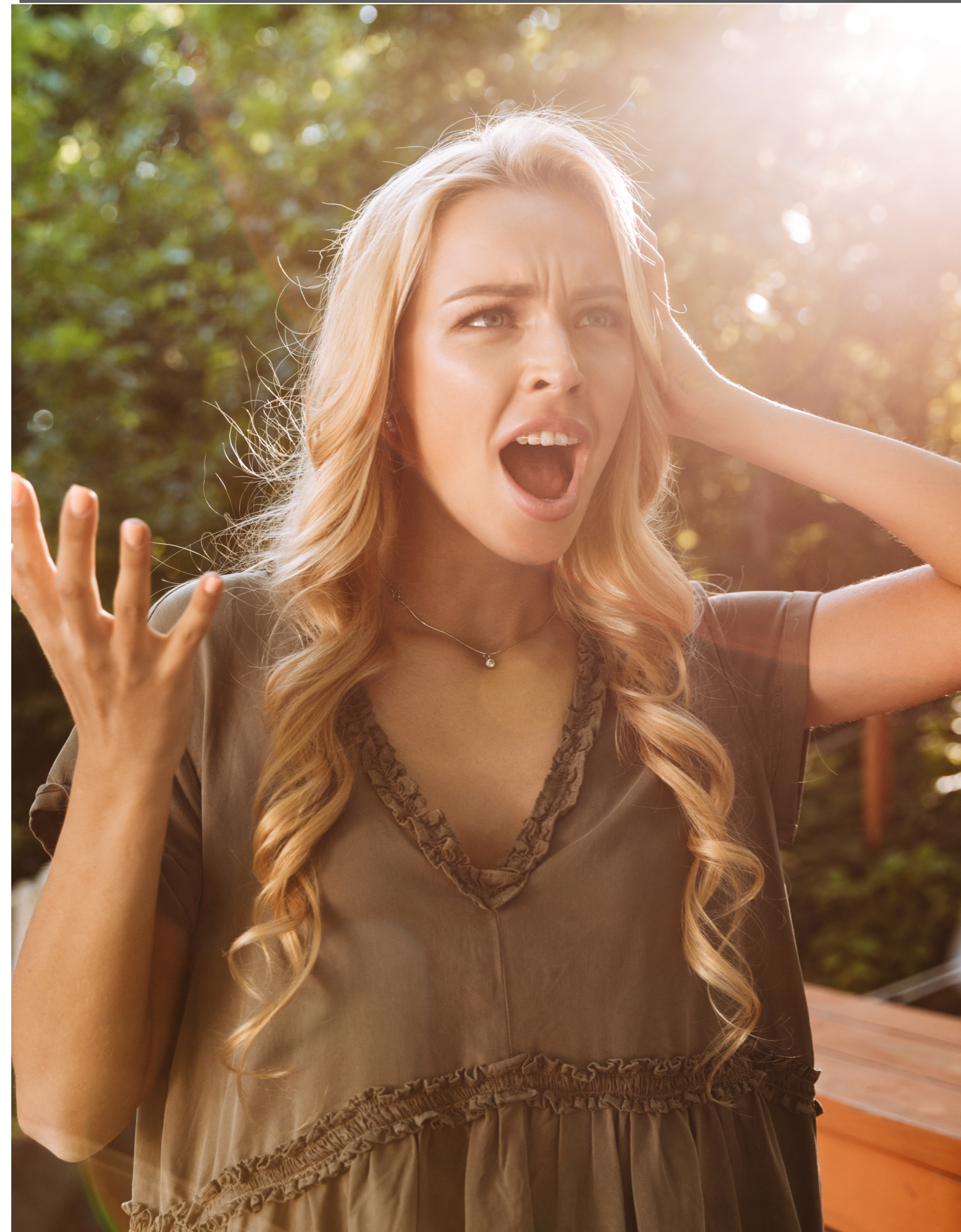


Meeting his family

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I'm Petra, a British college student from Essex. I grew up in a conservative, rural and Christian environment so it was pretty much a shock for everybody when I told my family I was dating an Arab, muslim guy. It was pretty shocking for me too to realise how much I liked him at first, I never saw myself as dating foreign men but love can change people minds. Aram was a wealthy young Saudi man who had attended the most prestigious colleges in London, and honestly his wealth played a role in overcoming my initial xenophobia. I didn't grow up rich and soon realized this was my best chance at becoming rich, given the current state of the economy. My family never really liked him but still accepted us. His family had a harder time accepting me, though.

"What do you mean, your family won't accept me?"

"My dear, please don't make a big deal out of this, we have been together for over a year now, it's only a minor obstacle on our path together"

"Well, I don't want to remain invisible, you know? Just man up and tell your parents you are dating a blonde, Christian girl!"

"Maybe we could find a compromise, tell them you are open to different forms of spirituality and maybe make you look a little less... British?"

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I really liked Aram and realised how many compromises he had to make to adapt living in a different country and culture. He told me how different was his upbringing in a strictly Muslim family compared to life in the UK. Was I being selfish? Should I also make an effort to smooth some differences? After all, I forced him to work on his accent before meeting my family to make a good impression on them, it was only fair that I also had to go through a few changes to meet his family's standards I guess. Moreover, he made me understand that his grandpa was some sort of powerful emir and that he really needed his approval. I liked the idea of marrying some sort of Arabian prince and I was willing to close an eye on the weird request.

I began reading about Islam just to familiarise myself with his culture more and I found myself increasingly fascinated by it. Aram also did his best to explain to me some common misconceptions about the role of women in Islam, and how they actually played a key role, as the mistresses of the house.

I dyed my hair dark brown and began taking tanning sessions. I also regularly applied a bronzer cream on my face. I didn't really know what look Aram had in mind but I was a little turned on by the idea of looking a little more exotic to make myself more palatable to his family.

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When I checked myself I realised I looked quite good as a brunette. My new tan also made me look healthier. I took a selfie and sent it to my boyfriend, while blowing a kiss. I felt like a teenager experimenting with her looks, it was kinda fun!

He liked the change but after a couple of days he admitted that he wasn't satisfied yet so he suggested I took a makeover session at a beauty salon specialised in middle Easterners looks where his sister worked. They would style my hair and apply some makeup to make me look a little different. He mentioned some other procedure but didn't go in full detail. The idea sounded exciting so I gladly accepted. He drove me there, mentioning that he won't be available to pick me up later all kissed me goodbye. When I reached the salon I noticed how all the customers were of Arab background, I was the only Caucasian person there, and everybody was staring at me, which made me feel a little uncomfortable. It made sense though, I guessed. I realized they had apparently reserved a full room just for me. Aram wasn't really sparing any money on me!

They began applying a lip plumper on me, I could feel my lips reacting to the chemicals and inflating. I would have looked good with big lips, I thought. Then they dyed my hair again, worked on my face, and even applied me color contacts on my eyes. After a few cups of hot tea, I began feeling very relaxed, maybe it was the white noise of the hairdryer or something, but I dozed off.

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When I woke up I had a terrible headache. It was dark outside, and the lights were mostly off, so I could barely see my reflection. One of the few remaining girls around told me with a thick Arab accent that they didn't want to disturb me while I was sleeping. I was feeling a little embarrassed, I commented that I must have dozed off, and quickly left the salon after I was given some lotions to keep my hair silky and makeup intact. I noticed that my hair had indeed been turned silky jet black, the dye must have been really high quality because it looked like a natural colour. I began worrying about how long it would take for me to be a blonde again after visiting my in-laws, the dye I had used before would have worn off naturally after a few weeks but now I realised I would probably have had to regrow my natural hair from scratch.

I sat at the bus stop, waiting for the bus. I couldn't afford a car, unfortunately, but that was going to change once me and Aram were officially a couple. Then we would move in together and I would have access to his rich lifestyle.

I noticed that the date on the bus schedule screen was the 24th. "Weird - I thought - I could have sworn it was the 22nd."

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I jumped into the bus and quickly showed my subscription card to the bus driver. He gave me a weird look but let me go, he looked really tired. Did I look that different - I began to worry. I spotted an old classmate from high school on the bus, I waved at him but he ignored me. I started to worry. I took out my phone to check myself but the battery was dead.

As soon as I arrived at home, I rushed to the mirror in the toilet and almost fainted at my reflection. A complete stranger was looking back at me, an Arab beauty with doe brown eyes, thick lips, a mocha-coloured skin and vaguely oriental facial features. Could really makeup change my appearance that much? Any trace of the nordic, caucasian woman I was had vanished from my face.

Aram appeared from the background.

"I guess I owe you some explanations. You look gorgeous by the way!"

"You're a fucking weirdo! What did they do to me?" - I erupted.

"These procedures are only temporarily, there's no need to freak out sweetie. I knew you wouldn't agree to them so I had to get them done without your approval but you'll see it's no big deal. See, my sister works in cosmetic surgery, so she performed a few procedures on me."

"Procedures? So this isn't only makeup?" - I asked, terrified.

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"Nothing too invasive, she injected some collagen into your lips, which will be reabsorbed in a few weeks, and applied special brown contacts"

"Lip injections, that's why they feel so numb!" - I exclaimed, touching my inflated lips. "I realized that something had been applied to my eyes but I can't see the lenses..." - I added looking at my natural-looking brown irises.

"Oh it's just a new kind of color contacts. You won't have to take them off every day by the way, they are made to be worn for about a month non-stop. What else? Oh yeah, a little nose job to make you look more Arab, an eyes lift..."

"Nose job? Eyes? Shit!" - I said, checking myself nervously in the mirror and noticing how my nose was more pronounced, giving my appearance a Semitic flavour and my brown eyes had a shape that reminded of Indian or Arab women. My heart sank. That was a bit too much. I felt like dumping Aram on the spot, but what could I do, looking like this? "Not even my sister would recognise me right now" - I thought. "Without Aram's sister's help I might not be able to reverse these procedures, better play along for now" - I concluded. "I look very Arab indeed... That's a lot to take, do you realise that?" - I said.

"How about my skin, why is it so dark?" - I asked, noticing how the brown color was spread all over my body.

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"Just some Melanotan injections to give you a natural, healthy looking tan."

"Melanotan?" - I asked, worried - "I've heard about it, doesn't it also affect hair colour and stuff?"

"Well yeah actually it gradually increases pigmentation level in hair too, so you won't have to dye your hair dark again for the time being but again it's totally reversible, you'll be back to your old pale and blonde self as soon as you stop taking the drug."

"Will I have to take it for long?" - I was already accepting my new look for the time being.

"Only for a few weeks, until we meet my family." - he replied, smiling.

"Alright, I guess"

I looked at my reflection again. As much as I hated to admit it, I looked hot. Hotter than before. The dark complexion, the exotic features, everything in me was Arab beauty at its best. My dark eyes had a new intensity, my face a more piercing beauty, and my brown skin was incredibly radiant. I might enjoy this a bit after all.

"I'll just try and make the most out of these weeks and then probably dump Aram after I'll be back to normal."



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I accepted my current condition for the time being, although I had been forced into it.

We took a couple of weeks to get used to my new look and to come up with a convincing story before flying to Saudi Arabia to meet my boyfriend's family.

I noticed a few changes in the way people looked at us. Before my change in appearance we would sometimes get looks from people for being an interracial couple. A blonde British girl with an Arab man still bothered some people. Now, however, nobody was noticing us. We were just a couple of immigrants from the Middle East. It felt weird to feel like a stranger in my own country but I think we looked like a good match. Also, many people started speaking to me in Arabic on the streets and in shops. Everybody was shocked by my native Essex accent.

Obviously I had to avoid my family and friends for the time being, it would have been too difficult to justify my changed appearance so I was spending lots of time with my boyfriend. Aram was super charming and sweet to me and I felt that even sex was better than before. Was I more like his type now?

I was taking regular melanotan pills and I noticed that my tan was stabilising even without tanning bed sessions. My hair regrowth was jet black as the rest of my hair and even my pubic hair went from blonde to black. I wasn't a blonde anymore, at least for the time being.