

The Hijab Diaries

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Hanna was a beautiful Austrian girl living in a multicultural area in Vienna. She was a student in medicine and, during the summer break, took on a summer job as a Starbucks barista to pay the bills. Her family was an ancient one, respected and even famous in her town in Styria, but not too wealthy anymore, and having moved from a small countryside town to the capital, she was always shocked at the high living costs of Vienna. Luckily, she had landed that summer job.

One day, she was heading there, minding her own business, thinking about a tinder date she had scheduled for that evening. She had already her makeup on and a pretty black leather jacket on as she was planning to head there right after her shift ended. At some point, she was stopped by a man at a stand where Muslims encouraged local women to experience wearing a hijab. She was kinda curious to try it on, just to see how it felt and how she would look, but on the other side she didn't like it as she saw it as a symbol of oppression and associated it to a negative meaning, being influenced by the echoes of Islamophobia that pervaded her surroundings. The man was really insisting and had a certain natural magnetism. They discussed for a while, until Hanna eventually accepted. She also realised that saying yes was probably the quickest way to get back on her way to work instead of discussing. A couple of girls took some hijabs and invited her aside of the stand. "I hope this won't take long" - she told herself.

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She was asked to take off her leather jacket and the top under that, leaving her almost in underwear, and then they began covering up her blonde hair and styling the hijab. There was something mesmerising in the Arab women's gestures to style the headscarf and their whispers in Arabic. Hanna listened to their whispers, without understanding them.

The fabric was tightly wrapped around her head, making her worry that it would mess up her hair. "Fuck, not today! I want to look good for my date this evening!" - she thought, but it was too late to back off.

She put on her top again, but was told to keep the leather jacket away, as it wouldn't match the modest outfit. She felt embarrassed and almost ashamed as the Muslim women did the final touches for the Hijab around her head and adjusted it, noticing the disapproving looks she was getting from her fellow countrymen. "God, I hope none of my friends see me right now!" - she thought, ashamed.

"You're all set up! Do you want to see yourself?"

"S... sure!" - Hanna replied, a bit skeptical.

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Then she looked at herself in a mirror. Her heartbeat accelerated. She looked so different! To a first impression, she looked almost like any other Muslim girl around, as her blonde hair had disappeared under the headscarf and her facial features looked different in a hijab. They asked her how she was feeling, and, uncertain on what to say, she replied: "Hmm, I look beautiful but... different!". They took some pictures and then told her that given how good she looked, she could keep the hijab.

Not wanting to lose further time, as she was already late for her shift, she thanked them and left, planning to take the hijab off once turned around the corner. However, it was tightly wrapped around her head, so she struggled. She started to panic, but people were starting to stare even more, as a woman taking off her hijab was something unusual. She thought about going back to the stand but decided to keep it on until she reached the Starbucks. She counted down the minutes as people stared her a lot on the subway and on her way to the place. Once she got there, a colleague of her, Yusuf, a Turkish guy, spotted her. She felt a wave of embarrassment. Not him! She was hoping to find any other colleague but him.



The irony of her situation. They had argued before about politics and gender roles, now, donning a hijab, Hanna stood enveloped in the very symbol they had spiritedly discussed.

"Who would have said, Hanna! That is quite a change!" Hanna replied in a mix of embarrassment and urgency "I can explain - this is not... I've not become a Muslim!" - she said, lowering her gaze, and explained her situation. "And I don't like it for the record, so I'm going to take it off immediately. Enjoy this sight while it lasts!" - she added, with a smirk, noticing the disappointment on his face. She left for the changing room, where she tried taking the hijab off, first gently, then frantically pulling it, to no avail, if not chocking herself. With one last push, she mistakenly grabbed her shirt, tearing it. "Fuck!" - she screamed. Yusuf knocked on the door of the changing room. "Hanna, my shift is over, are you ready?" "I... It's not coming off. And now my clothes are a disaster." - she said, opening the door. "Oh, I see" - Yusuf commented, with a smirk "Hmm... You could wait for Amina to come over to help you after your shift is done" "In 6 hours?" - Hanna said, in tears. "I'm afraid so. You could borrow her dress in the meanwhile". With a defeated look, Hanna nodded. She had a similar body type as Amina, and the modest dress would go well with her hijab.



She adorned herself in Amina's attire, the silky fabric draping her form in unfamiliar modesty. She put on the long, silky skirt covering her legs to her ankles and the top part, with a really high neckline, covering all of her skin, leaving only her face and hands visible. Hanna took a quick look in the mirror. She felt like she was wearing a costume. Too bad Carnival was over. Blushing, she walked out of the changing room area and stood behind the desk. Hanna didn't like it but she couldn't leave, or she'd lose the job, and she really needed the money. She took a deep breath and began her long day. Customers treated her differently. Old men and women were quite judgmental at seeing a beautiful Austrian girl with no hint of foreign accent wearing such an outfit. A couple of Arab guys seriously asked her if she was married. She blushed and nodded, to get out of the sticky situation, even though she was implying she was married to a Muslim man. What a shame, her, a pure-blooded Austrian girl, marrying an Arab, Muslim man. What would her family say? She felt as if a little electric shock went through her body, her nipples hardening at the idea. Shit, what a messed-up thought, she told herself, scrolling it off. Finally, Amina arrived. "Wow, Hanna! You look beautiful" - she said with a giggle. "Yusuf told me everything, let me have a look." "It has been surreal today" - Hanna commented "Honestly, I don't know how do you Muslim girls live with this!" "Oh, come on! It's not so bad!" - Amina replied.



After a careful inspection of the hijab, she sighed "Just what I feared." "Hmm?" - asked Hanna, panicking. "It's an ancient knot that I'm not familiar with, few women use it nowadays." "Why don't we cut it away?" Hanna asked, her face beaming. "We could, but" - Amina paused - "it's so intertwined with your hair, we would certainly cut most of your hair too if we did. Hanna gulped. "Don't worry, though. I know the girls at the stand, they hang out at my mosque. In fact, if you hurry up you could catch them before they leave!" "I... I can't, I have a Tinder date soon" - Hanna replied, disheartened. Amina smiled "Well, if you don't want to show up at your date wearing a hijab, you'd better reschedule. It's going to be a different evening, I'm afraid." Hanna groaned. "By the way" - Amina continued, with a sweet tone "I'm afraid I need my outfit for the shift. But worry not, I took with me an abaya you could borrow." Hanna meekly let Amina disrobe her, apart from the hijab, and dress her in an elegant black abaya, decorated with yellow and brown floral motifs and complete with gloves. "I bought it in Saudi Arabia" - she explained, while styling an additional matching layer on top of her hijab. "It's perfect for a visit at the mosque!"

On the bus on her way to the mosque, she texted her date, making up an excuse. It felt surreal to type a message on the Tinder app while wearing black gloves matching her traditional Muslim outfit.



Amina told her that the gloves were mandatory for a visit to the mosque, and Hanna didn't want to forget them on the bus, or she might miss a chance to intercept the women at the mosque. "Done" - she thought as she pressed 'Send'. She finally had a moment to reflect, after a day that felt more like a movie than real life. She noticed that most men and women were not sitting close to her, preferring to stand instead. She groaned. She did this too, sometimes, avoiding to sit close to an immigrant. Now she was basically one of them. At the following stop, another Hijabi girl came in and sat next to her, smiling at her. She lowered her glance. She looked even more exotic wearing the elaborate abaya her colleague gave her. She closed her eyes and tried forgetting about the situation she was in, but even then, the unfamiliar feeling of the headscarf reminded her of the situation she was in. She could feel her hair itching under it "I bet it's getting all greasy under there! Shit, I should probably book an appointment at the hairdresser when this shit will be over".

When she finally arrived at the mosque, she was impressed by how large it was, with a garden and everything. "Fuck, and they used taxpayers' money for all of this!" After a while, she found the women's section and, for a stroke of luck, she found the girls she had seen earlier.



They remind speechless after seeing the blonde Austrian girl still wearing a hijab, now complete with an abaya, and visiting a mosque. "Assalamu alaikkum" - they erupted "Have you reverted to Islam?" "No, actually... I tried to take the headscarf off but it got stuck. And this dress... I borrowed from a friend because I ruined mine." As she spoke, she realised the story made very little sense. The girls commented that God is the best planner and that she should keep doors open.

Hanna nodded and listened to their advices for a while. Then, she insisted, asking them to free her from the hijab, as they were the only ones able to help her. They agreed, a bit disappointed that they had failed in their mission, and told her to follow them to a private area where women could undress. She couldn't take her hijab off in a public area in a Mosque, after all.

Before removing it, though, the girls tried on a few other outfits on Hanna, who was too tired to fight back. She tried on a beautiful North African outfit borrowed it from one of the girl's friends and had to admit she didn't look half bad. She was getting a peculiar taste in terms of modest clothing after a while.



Finally, the girls begged her to try on one last dress, an outfit one of the girls had brought from home for a special occasion. It took a while to disrobe her - keeping on the infamous hijab, of course, and dress her up again, but when they were done and Hanna could finally open her eyes, she immediately noticed this was different. It was a white outfit, with lots of lace and pearls. They had even given her elaborate earrings. Hanna gulped "Is it... a bridal dress?" "Yes" - the Muslim girls said, with a giggle. "You look so beautiful!" "You would make your husband a very happy man!" - they commented. "Great, the first time ever I see myself in a bridal dress, and it's a Muslim one! I'll never be able to erase this image from my memory now!" - she thought, speechless. As they meandered through an open courtyard within the mosque's expansive grounds, their presence caught the attention of the Imam himself. Hanna's heart raced as she instinctively lowered her gaze, trying to disappear into the folds of the exquisite dress. One of the girls apologised "Dear Imam, we got distracted and didn't notice this was a common space. We beg for your pardon." "I see we have a newcomer" - the Imam noted, his displeasure evident at the breach of decorum - "Yes, she's interested in Islam, and she wanted to try on a bridal dress because she is dreaming of finding a Muslim husband." "Is that so?" Caught off guard, Hanna scrambled for words, "I am curious, yes, but my knowledge is still quite limited, dear Imam," - Hanna replied, hating the girls for coming up with such a lie.



The girls, invigorated by Hanna's half admission, told the Imam about how she had tried on a hijab earlier that day and how her life had changed since, which wasn't even a lie.

The spiritual guide offered a warm smile and commented that indeed, God is the best planner. Then stared at Hanna and told her "I know you still have a lot to learn, but you can make your profession of faith already now. His infinite knowledge will guide you through your journey. Repeat after me: *La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammadur rasoolu Allah*". Caught in the moment and not wanting to engage in a difficult conversation, she hesitantly echoed the declaration, her heart beating like crazy: "*La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammadur rasoolu Allah*".

It hit her that from that moment on, she was officially a Muslim woman. "I am literally a Muslim now, everything's gonna change for me, what am I doing?" - she thought. Her, Hanna, an Austrian Christian woman, was now a Muslim? She thought about the stories she had heard about the way those who rejected their Muslim faith were persecuted and nearly fainted, feeling trapped. She nearly lost her balance, a reaction that seemed to validate the spiritual leader's genuine optimism for her. "Let her rest" - he told the girls "She just had the biggest day of her life so far." He added, and left, leaving Hanna with the girls.



Overwhelmed themselves and unable to articulate their feelings, the girls assisted Hanna in changing out of the bridal gown and into the black abaya, recognizing that there was no longer any justification for her to dress otherwise, when Hanna started crying.

"Why did you let this happen to me? I'm so fucked! I can't possibly tell my family about converting and I can't keep pretending everything is normal, while dressing like this? What will everyone think? People will recognise me! I'm sorry, but I have to take back my words. I cannot commit to Islam."

In response, her friends began softly reciting a prayer. Hanna felt mesmerised again by their words. "Could there be some truth to their beliefs?" - she thought, before quickly dismissing the thought. After a few seconds, the girls stopped and began staring at her in awe. "What's happening?" - Hanna asked, confused. "Your eyes," one friend whispered in disbelief, "they've changed to brown."

Hanna felt a wave of dread. The emotions of that day made her mind shake. "That's not possible" - she said, reaching for her phone.



Activating the camera, she was confronted with the reflection of her eyes, now a deep shade of brown, a stark contrast to their usual green. "It's just the lighting," she attempted to reassure herself, though her conviction wavered. The girls dragged her to a changing room in the women area.

The light was stronger, but her eyes were still brown.

One of the girl finally began taking off her hijab, to allow her to see herself better. As her hair became loose, the girls erupted in a spontaneous scream, followed by more rounds of prayers. Instead of the blonde waves she had just a few hours before, luscious dark brown curls cascaded on her shoulders.

"No! No! This can't be!" - murmured Hanna in a mix of shock and contemplation.

"This can't be happening... I'm becoming one of you!" - Hanna added. She frantically tugged at her newly darkened locks, but they were undeniably her own. Her hair was dark brown up to its roots. Even her skin tone had darkened by a couple of shades, she noticed, matching with her darkened complexion.