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I just look like a Muslim to most, but to a few I am an unwanted creature, a terrorist. The thought of me being called a terrorist ran through my head over and over again as I tightened my scarf and took my first step into middle school in a hijab. I thought it was bad enough being how I was before. Even though throughout 6th grade I didn't wear a scarf on my head, all I heard around me was, "ugly terrorist," "you need a bag on your head," and "immigrant." I went mute after that, barely spoke a word. That innocent little girl became what she believed herself to be.

It was an ordinary day. I woke up at 6:30, got dressed, and looked at the mirror. I stared at the girl looking back at me: with her long black hair flowing everywhere from the front of her face all the way down her back, her light brown eyes filled with confidence, such confidence that nothing could bring her down. Not until that day.

That day was nerve wracking for me. I mean making a huge change is nerve wracking for most people. Everything was okay at first. I sat in the cafeteria waiting for the bell, hoping no one would say anything, but I was wrong. People came up to me making a wall of intimidation around me, mentally and physically. They asked so many questions that I didn't know how to answer, mainly because I was afraid to speak. They laughed their hearts out. They touched my hijab, and one person actually pulled my scarf off my head. Everyone asked to see that innocent girl's hair. She felt insulted. She wanted to practice her religious views without all that crap. She wanted to yell. She wanted them to stop. She started to think it was a

mistake to wear a hijab. She wanted them to leave her alone, but nothing came out of her mouth. She just walked away. She walked away with nothing left but tears in her eyes.

After that day I was very scared to do anything – scared to speak, scared to do work on the board, scared to change myself, scared to tell someone. I usually sat with my teachers at lunch and in the morning as well, whatever I could do to hide from everyone. I did whatever I could to get my mind off the thought of them hurting me again. I'd work, clean, draw, and help others. It suddenly hit me, what will I do next year? I can't keep hiding behind my teachers. Just that thought got me so mad.

Anyone who came my way never spoke to me again. I would beat up people at the portables. I would curse out anyone who said anything about me. I pushed people. I hurt them like they hurt me. I became a girl who reflected her feelings on others. I basically became the bully. When I realized that I was the bad guy this time, I stopped. I didn't want to hurt anyone. I went back to that helpless girl hiding from the world. I felt like I went through different phases of who I wanted to be as a Muslim. People knew I was tough and rude so they didn't bother me as much; one good thing came out of that. But they just left me alone. I never had a friend since.

I remember a girl who actually tried to talk to me and tried to be my friend. Her name escapes my mind but her face is clear to me. At lunch, I was sitting outside on the bleachers drawing henna designs all over my paper; she came up to me.

"Hi," I looked up and saw her face and thought it must be a prank or a dare to talk to the terrorist. I ignore her.

"What's your name?" I looked up.

"Arooj," I replied cautiously making sure that I didn't get laughed at. People laughed at my name, thinking it's so many things other than what it really is, Arooj.

"That's a nice name. What does it mean?" I looked up and she was still smiling.

"It means highest of all or rise."

"That sounds soo cool! What wou...," she couldn't finish her sentence. Out of nowhere two girls run up to us and I think, oh shit, please do not say anything.

"Who do you like? Chris, Jonathan or Kevin?" I looked confused. I didn't know any of them or like them. They asked again, "Who do you like? Chris, Jonathan, or Kevin?"

"Wait, did you say Chris?"

I looked to my right and looked at her. She was still smiling. The two girls ran off to find whoever Chris was to tell him that someone likes him.

"Wow! So stupid" I looked down and continued to finish my flower.

"Wow!! That's soo beautiful! You have to teach me that!" she commented. I looked up and as soon as I opened my mouth to say something, beep, the bell rang. I grabbed my things and ran off to class.



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