



## **A Tale of Beauty and Tragedy**

Amira's life hung by a fragile thread, like a flickering candle in the darkest of nights. Her breaths were but fleeting whispers and the once vibrant light in her eyes had dimmed to a mere glimmer. As I stood by her side in that fateful moment, the weight of regret and the haunting question of what led us here surrounded me. How had we arrived at this point, where Amira's life slipped away, and her dreams dissolved like desert sands in the wind?

In the heart of Mauritania, within the remote village of Azougui, my younger sister Amira lived a life filled with dreams and hopes for the future. We both shared a similar background, our roots deeply ingrained in this village, and our dreams intertwined. I, too, once walked the path of those dreams and did manage to secure a husband, but alas, the outcome was far from what I had envisioned. When I began to lose weight my husband sent me home and that is when I had to put an end to my dreams. Unlike me, Amira was dedicated to breaking the record. In a society where a woman's greatest power is her beauty, the prevailing notion of beauty demands to be fat. Amira believed that she could actually be fat as it was the only key to achieving her dreams – a life where she could find love, get married, and raise a family. Her heart brimmed with the desire to care for her children and build a future filled with happiness. In the arid desert of our village, her dreams shone brighter than the relentless sun, illuminating the path she wished to follow.

From a young age, Amira was captivated by the notion of beauty. She longed to be admired, to have the allure that only a generously rounded figure could bring. In her dreams, she imagined herself as the paradigm of Mauritanian beauty, a woman who could command any man's attention with her massive weight.

However, Amira's reality was a stark contrast to her dreams. Try as she might, she couldn't gain the weight required to fit society's beauty ideals. Our mother believed in the traditional practice of "leblouh," which involved force-feeding young girls to make them more appealing to potential husbands. The process was brutal, with experts brought in to oversee the feeding.

Amira, with hope in her heart, embarked on this painful journey. She watched as her plate was filled to the brim with calorie-dense foods, and she tried her best to

swallow the overwhelming portions. But, despite the relentless efforts of our mother and the force-feeding experts, Amira's body refused to conform to the image of beauty her society demanded.

Our mother was devastated. She had hoped her daughter would become the embodiment of beauty, I mean that is what every mother wants for her daughter right?, a testament to her own success as a mother. But Amira's struggle only left our mother in despair.

Amira's desperation to be beautiful grew by the day. She turned to me, seeking a solution to her problem. I knew of a dangerous shortcut – medications known to increase weight rapidly. These drugs included steroids and dexamethasone, substances with known health risks.

Our mother, aware of the dangers, refused to support Amira on this one. She feared for her daughter's health, knowing that the pursuit of beauty shouldn't come at the cost of one's life, I was on my mother's side. But Amira, consumed by the desire to conform to society's standards of beauty, turned a deaf ear to me and my mother's pleas.

Amira started taking the medications, her impatience and longing for beauty pushing her towards this perilous path. Day by day, I watched as her appearance underwent a remarkable metamorphosis. My curiosity got the best of me, and I couldn't help but inquire about her transformation. However, each time I broached the subject, she curtly dismissed me, advising that I should mind my own business. Her skin took on a deeper hue, and her body expanded as if her fervent desire for beauty was materializing right before my very eyes. Perhaps, against all odds, her unwavering determination was giving results. Only time will tell.

Amira had no understanding of the right dosage for the medication, and her fervor for rapid transformation led her down a perilous path. Recklessly, she consumed an alarming amount of steroids daily, driven by the misguided belief that more medication would expedite the process. This self-destructive pattern repeated with each passing day, subjecting her body to a relentless barrage of substances.

As her actions persisted, her body bore the brunt, and her health deteriorated at an alarming pace. Her heart, in particular, endured the consequences of her imprudent choices. Excruciating episodes of chest pain and breathlessness became

stark manifestations of her heart's anguish, akin to lightning bolts of torment coursing through her. The reality that the steroids were wreaking havoc on her body, causing irreversible damage, became agonizingly clear.

Desperate, we sought the help of doctors, but they informed us that there was little they could do to reverse the damage caused by the excessive medication. Amira's condition grew increasingly dire, her suffering intensifying as her body slowly betrayed her.

One fateful night, as I was sleeping with Amira by my side, she took my hand so tight that I was getting concerned and called for help. Out of nowhere our mother bursted into the room and rushed to Amira's side, tears streaming down her face. She held Amira's cold hand, whispering words of love and regret, hoping that they would bring her back to life. Amira's breathing grew labored, her chest heaving with each painful gasp for air. Where I was standing, I couldn't speak or cry a big rock was stuck in my throat. My head was filled with all the possibilities of what it would be like if only she didn't use those drugs.

In that moment, Amira understood the terrible mistake she had made. The pursuit of an unattainable beauty had cost her the most precious gift of all—her life. With one last, rasping breath, she closed her eyes, leaving behind a world that had judged her worth solely by her appearance.

Amira's story, one of longing, desperation, and the high price of conforming to society's impossible standards serves as a poignant reminder of the harsh realities faced by the women of Mauritania. In a world where beauty standards can be as unforgiving as the desert, Amira's tale stands as a haunting testament to the lengths some will go to in search of acceptance and love, even if it means losing their own lives in the process.