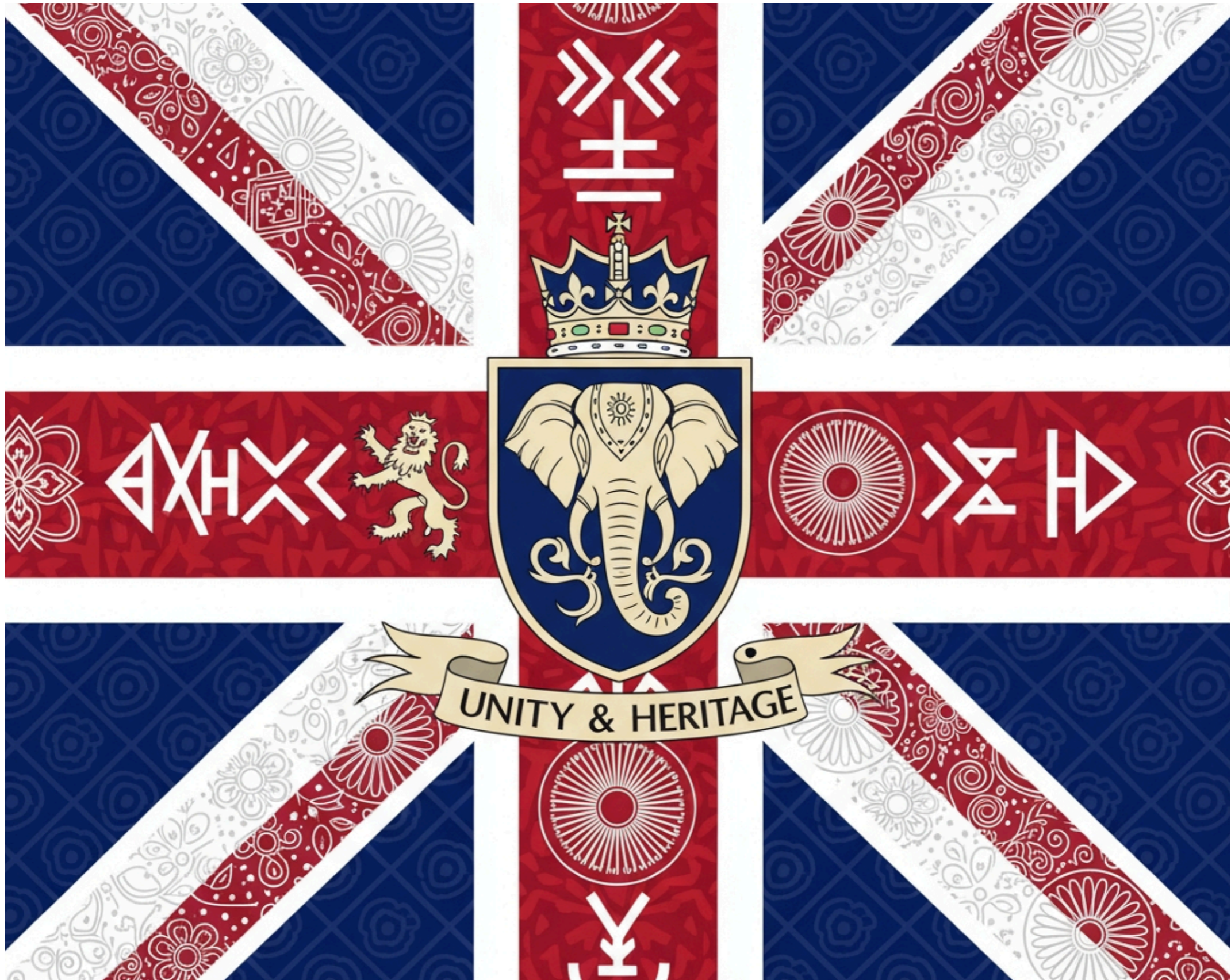


BRAND NEW WORLD - COLONIZED UK





After the fall of Westminster's power and the dismantling of the old monarchy, the UK became administrated by a commonwealth of nations that used to be its former colonies. A "Commonwealth Council" made up of ministers from India, Pakistan, Uganda, Jamaica, and other former colonies assumed collective administration over the UK. It was sold as reparative justice, an "administrative partnership" to settle old debts of empire. In practice, it was a reversal of the imperial relationship.

In the new Britain, white Britons found themselves at the bottom of a hierarchy they had once controlled. They had less chances of getting hired, of career progress, and were generally regarded as less attractive than everybody else. Diversity "boosters" were then distributed on a voluntary basis: genetic and hormonal treatments that eased assimilation into the cultures now running the country. Skin tones shifted, eye shapes changed, hair textures curled or darkened. Posters on the Tube advertised it as "Joining the Future Together." Eventually, they became practically mandatory for white British people if they wanted to retain their jobs and citizenship.



When she had no other choice, Ella booked an appointment to get her diversity shot. She would have to take a few weeks off from work to give her time for the lengthy process of gene replacement. Surprisingly, her boss and the whole management were very supportive.

Ella was shocked to see her freckled pasty pale skin take on a light brown hue, her green eyes turn hazel and her ginger hair darken to light brown over the weeks as her DNA was being rewritten.

To make the process even more dramatic, patients had no idea what ethnicity they were being turned into. In principle, all ethnicities of the former British Empire would be represented. In reality, the vast majority of the shots gave patients Indian or African/Caribbean DNA. Even though the process was supposed to be random, it was possible to bribe officials to get a preference and, given how South Asian Brits already had a position of wealth and power in the country, the upper class usually preferred that option. Ella was a young intern in a big law firm and her position did not allow her to have a chance at that.



She got frequent visits from her boyfriend, Matthew, still in his original caucasian body, waiting for his own mandatory genetic reassignment. The shock of seeing her transformation never failed to register in his eyes. They would have to learn to love their new bodies all over again, there were so many stories of couples breaking up because they weren't attracted by each other anymore. And at the same time he still did not know how he'd end up looking like but there would be a time for that too. They had to cope with this day by day now.

Ella flex her hands, studying them. "I think the changes are finally stabilizing."

"Yeah, I can tell. The pigmentation seems... settled. You won't get much darker than this." He said it like it was a comfort.

"I don't get it, I was so sure I'd get sub-Saharan African DNA, like Molly and Kate."

"The system hasn't rigged *everything* yet I guess. Apparently some Indian DNA shots were still available."



The metamorphosis was nearing its end, but it refused to go quietly. Ella's skin deepened another two shades, settling into a rich, walnut hue, while her hair transformed from a common brown to a jet black cascade. The final, most unsettling shift was in her eyes; the flecks of green and gold in her hazel irises were extinguished, leaving behind a flat, dark brown.

Then came the purge. A feverish heat bloomed from within, a final, violent rebellion from a body that was no longer hers. For three days, she was wracked with relentless sweating. It wasn't mere perspiration, but a viscous exudation as her new DNA scoured every cell, expelling the last remnants of the woman she used to be.

After that, she reached her final form, that of a pretty young Indian woman with a medium-toned complexion, raven-black wavy hair, and chocolate-brown eyes set above a button nose and gracile features. Her boyfriend's whistle of appreciation was a hollow sound. "Well, it's a... a pretty good package," he admitted. She forced a smile.

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Returning to work was like walking onto a stage. Everybody asked her politely to introduce herself. Her Indian colleagues were slightly amused by seeing their ginger colleague turned into an Indian beauty, but were very welcoming, while her remaining white colleagues showed a mix of curiosity and discomfort by seeing her new self. As a result, she naturally gravitated more around her Indian colleagues during lunch break.

Her boss, Brij, a chubby Indian man in his late fifties, looked up from his desk, a slow smirk spreading across his face. "Ah! Looking radiant, Raha!" He used the new name as if it were a brand, searing it onto her. The young woman nodded, shy.

"Btw, you owe us a debt of gratitude. That new DNA is a corporate benefit." "What?" - she asked.

"Company policy. Since our firm is owned by Indian investors, we decided to give our team a uniform look. Well, you're a little on the dark side but still... Your look was chosen to optimize impressions on customers. You'll do a lot of customer care in the future."



Customer care? That had never been one of her mansions so far, she reflected.

"And I trust you've noticed the... enhanced breasts? Also data-driven."

Raha blushed under her brown skin.

"I see. Thank you, Mr. Jashal." - she replied, embarrassed and humiliated.

"Very good. Don't forget to enroll in the cultural acclimation course, by the way." he added cheerfully. "Complete with a couple of weeks in Mumbai to connect with your *new heritage*. Actually, why don't you join me on my next business trip?" - he added.

Raha thought about it and decided to take the chance to visit India for the first time. At least, it would be an interesting experience.

She accompanied him as the new face of the company, some sort of like eye candy, as well as to learn more about Indian culture and Hindi.



She was given a company credit card to buy herself outfits and makeup to look at her best. She used it to acquire a wardrobe worthy of a Bollywood starlet, and when she boarded the plane to Mumbai, she looked the part.

The cultural activities were slightly boring but the intensive language course paid off. After a while, the sound of the Hindi came easier and easier to her and to her surprised she caught herself slipping in a rolling indian "r" in English when she was tired. As if her body found it easier to talk that way.

There was curiosity around her, as the rumor British people had started being turned into Indians was spreading like crazy. Many young men proposed to her, leaving her amused and blushing. She had a boyfriend, after all, and none of them were her type anyway. Brij in the meanwhile was always very nice to her, he bought her outfits, presents and made her feel valued. It was a bit over the top but he was her boss after all, and she wouldn't report him to HR. Also, had never ever fancied older men, especially her boss, but now she found his confidence and power very fascinating. Fantasies of him began to intrude, vivid and unwelcome, yet thrilling.



One night, she made the mistake of ordering cheesecake. The reaction was swift; her new body, she discovered, was lactose intolerant. Brij explained "Many of us lack the enzyme. It's a common trait." He offered to escort her to his hotel room in the adjacent building. Weak and miserable, she agreed. But the moment his door clicked shut, a strange thing happened. The physical discomfort receded, replaced by a sudden, sharp thrill at being alone with him in the intimate space. The color returned to her cheeks.

"Did you perhaps overstate your distress to find yourself here with me?" he asked, his voice a low murmur.

The question should have offended her. Instead, it felt like an invitation. "Maybe," she heard herself whisper, and she was the one who closed the distance, leaning in for a kiss.

What am I doing? The thought was a lightning strike in the dark. She was cheating on her boyfriend with her boss—her much older boss. A wave of confusion and self-revulsion washed over her. Why did this feel so unnervingly right?



Brij noticed the shift instantly. He pulled back just enough to study her face, his thumb tracing her jawline. "I see the conflict," he said. "You're wondering why you're drawn to me. You never fancied older men before." A slow, knowing smile touched his lips. "Well, that has changed, too."

A cold dread seeped into her. "You... you did that?"

"I had a spectrum of preferences to choose from," he said, his gaze holding hers. "Let's just say I took advantage of the available options. Your previous attractions would have only caused you pain. They are gone. What you feel now, this pull toward authority, stability, is your reality. Your boyfriend is just a boy and can never satisfy you again. You will end up with an older man, no question about that. The only question is, will it be me, or someone less wealthy, who sees you as merely a pretty accessory?"

She reflected on it, then looked at him straight into the eyes and said "Then stop talking" she said, her voice trembling not with fear, but with a terrifying new hunger. "And take advantage of your investment."