

Exchange student - part 2

JANUARY 2025



Fast forward a few days, and the two girls had developed a more amicable relationship. They had been trying on dresses of all cultures and enjoyed their time partying as ethnic girls. However, Alba insisted on picking dresses that would keep her a light skinned, often blonde girl, while Kristin was relegated to more ethnic types. For some reason Alba liked keeping things that way. Finally, Kristin managed to convince her friend trying matching outfits, "Because it would be more fun!". They wore Brazilian samba outfits that turned them into two very different Brazilian beauties. Alba was a white Brazilian of predominantly German heritage, while Kristin looked more parda. Coming back from a night of partying, Kristin commented: "It was a fun night but I still don't get why I became a mixed Brazilian and you a white one!" "Both represent Brazil I guess!" "Yeah but nobody thought you were Brazilian! They thought you were German or something. Meanwhile, I got grabbed by three Brazilian guys who immediately started flirting with me in Portuguese. They said I danced like one of them." Alba laughed, a light, teasing sound. "And you loved it." "Okay, maybe a little. But that's not the point!"



"Why don't we both wear Dirndls?", the mixed Brazilian asked, hopeful. "I wanna be German too!"

"Sure, why not? I should have a couple of them!" - Alba answered without batting an eye.

She pulled a Dirndl from the rack and then, with some effort a second one. There you go! Kristin held the outfit up, already feeling the excitement bubble within her. Alba stayed pretty much the same, while Kristin's skin lightened slightly from her brown skin tone. Her facial features also shifted, losing their exotic Amerindian traits. She felt a rush of excitement. She was going to be white again for the first time in months! Maybe she would convince her friend to leave her like that. But the changes slowed down and stopped soon afterwards. She checked her reflection, disappointed. Her skin was lighter, yes, but still carried a faint olive undertone. Her eyes remained a deep brown, and her thick, dark hair hadn't budged.

"What the fuck? I have dark hair and brown eyes! I don't look German at all! And yet I know German and... Bu hangi dil? Almanca değil! What language is that?" - she asked, alarmed at the foreign sounds coming out of her mouth so naturally.

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"Oh, it's Turkish! I don't know if you're aware but there is a big Turkish community in Germany! You're second-generation. You know, like, fully integrated but with roots back in Anatolia."

The brunette girl fumed. She had been fooled again. "You've got to be kidding me." She tugged at the hem of her dress, fuming. The blonde adjusted her dress, highlighting her breasts. "I'm still pretty hot!" - she thought. While the Norwegian turned Turkish girl stared at her with envy and hatred. She felt like her tormentor was making fun of her.

"Why don't we go to the Oktoberfest looking like this? Me, as a blonde German girl and you as her brunette friend?"

They flew to Munich, as Franziska and Tulin. "Are you German - boys often asked the brunette." Franzi chimed in: "Oh, she is! She's Turkish-German—second generation, fully integrated, and very eager to meet German boys. Isn't that right, Tülin?" Worse still were the Turkish men who recognized her origins and spoke to her in Turkish. They would say, "Don't be ashamed of where you come from! You don't have to dress like a shameless German girl."



Back in Spain, eager to see her Spanish friend with a darker complexion, Kristin suggested they wear a saree this time. Alba was a bit worried this time, but reluctantly accepted. "Come on! You can't keep playing it safe. It'll be hilarious to see what the saree does to us," Kristin insisted.

Kristin put on the saree and immediately saw her skin darken to a deep brown hue. Her brows thickened, her facial features changed, her eyes became slightly Asian. She was fully southern Indian. She was much darker than before but at least she would see her friend with a darker complexion too, right? "Okay, your turn!" she called out. "Let's see you get the same treatment."

When Alba finally stepped out of the room, Kristin's excitement evaporated in an instant. Alba's complexion had taken on a golden tone, just enough to look exotic without being fully dark. Her facial features remained soft and delicate, her cheekbones high and defined, her eyes light. She looked like Alia Bhatt—a perfect mix of white and Indian. Kristin's jaw dropped as Alba twirled in her saree, her light-brown eyes sparkling with a familiar mischief. "What do you think?" Alba asked, striking a playful pose. "Not bad, huh?"



Kristin had had enough. Her frustration boiled over as she rifled through the wardrobe. "Alright, no more games, Alba. We're trying something different. Put this on." She held up a vibrant, flowing African dress complete with a matching turban. Alba raised an eyebrow, but the look on Kristin's face left no room for argument. Kristin slipped into her dress first, wrapping the turban snugly around her head. The transformation hit her like a wave. Her skin darkened to a deep, ebony hue, her lips plumped into a fuller, more prominent shape, and her features shifted into unmistakable Bantu contours—high cheekbones, a broader nose, and deep, soulful eyes. Her hair vanished beneath the turban, and when she caught her reflection, she gasped. She was undeniably African.

"Your turn," Kristin said, crossing her arms, her eyes daring Alba to finally share the same fate. When Alba emerged moments later, Kristin's jaw dropped. Alba's skin was extremely fair, her blonde hair cascading down her shoulders. Her features carried the delicate traces of Dutch and British ancestry, like a white South African straight out of colonial history. The colorful African dress looked more like an exotic costume on her than a natural fit. Kristin's face twisted into a mix of disbelief and rage. "You're still white? How is that even possible?"



Kristin was determined to finally see Alba transform into something other than a light-skinned version of herself. She held up the next outfit—a traditional Maori costume, complete with intricate patterns, woven accessories, and a feathered headdress. Alba shrugged. “Fine by me. Let’s see what happens.”

Kristin put her outfit on first, carefully adjusting the woven skirt and headdress. As soon as the fabric settled on her body, the changes began. Her skin took on a warm, golden-brown hue, her features becoming softer yet distinctly Polynesian. Her eyes remained a rich, dark brown, and her black hair grew into thick, glossy waves cascading down her back. Her body grew stronger, her muscles more defined, giving her an athletic, warrior-like presence. “Wow,” she whispered. “I... I really look Maori.” Then she turned to Alba, who was already adjusting her costume. Alba hadn’t changed much at all. Her blonde hair had darkened to a soft brown, and her skin carried the faintest hint of a tan, but she was still unmistakably white. She looked like a quintessential New Zealand girl of European descent. Alba frowned at her reflection, tilting her head. “What? I look a bit different.” “A bit?” Kristin snapped. “I’m over here looking like I could canoe across the Pacific, and you’re still someone who grew up on a sheep farm!”

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Kristin and Alba's latest venture into costumes led them to an American ranch theme. Kristin stared at the mirror, adjusting her checkered shirt and the fringed suede vest that hung perfectly against her form. She was hoping for a white southern girl look, but her skin had unexpectedly darkened into a deep, smooth brown hue, her afro framing her face like a halo. Her features were undeniably African American now—full lips, high cheekbones, and piercing dark eyes. Next to her, Alba adjusted her hat, her bright smile glowing as she inspected her own reflection. Her fair skin remained unchanged, wavy brunette hair cascading down her shoulders beneath the cowboy hat. She looked like she'd walked straight out of a southern postcard—classic, clean, and quintessentially white. Kristin frowned, her hands on her hips as she turned to Alba. "How is it that *every single time* you end up looking like some perfect, untouched version of yourself, while I'm the ethnic one?" "What? I've got a bit of a tan, don't I?" Kristin raised an eyebrow, her voice dripping with sarcasm. "Oh yeah, you're practically unrecognizable." Alba adjusted her belt, not taking Kristin's complaints too seriously. "Hey, African Americans are just as much a part of this country's history as a southern gal like me, sugar," she said with a wink. "Let's move south of the border—to *Mexico!*" Kristin announced, picking out two colorful dresses.



Alba laughed, holding up the colorful outfit. "Sure, sure. Let's see what happens."

Kristin's skin took on a smooth, golden-brown hue, her features softening into those of a classic Latina beauty. Her afro hair became straighter, cascading down her shoulders in loose waves. She turned to the mirror and let out a sigh. "Of course," she muttered, her voice laced with frustration. "I look like every stereotype of a Mexican telenovela girl."

Meanwhile, Alba stepped out from behind her, brushing a hand through her hair. Except it wasn't brown anymore. It was a fiery shade of red, falling in soft, perfect waves over her shoulders. Her pale skin, freckled across the nose, glowed against the black and green embroidery of her dress. Kristin's jaw dropped. "What? How—what the hell, Alba?"

Alba grinned, placing a hand on her hip. "What? I'm Mexican! Can't you tell?" Kristin pointed accusingly at her. "You're a *redhead*! That's not Mexican! Come on, there are no such Mexicans!" "Oh, but there *are*," Alba replied smugly. "Ever heard of the Irish immigrants who came to Mexico in the 1800s? Mexico's a diverse country." She smirked, leaning closer to Kristin. "Don't forget, I'm actually Hispanic. I know this *shit*."



Kristin stood by the mirror, tossing a sweater to Alba. "Alright, let's try this next. Let's try the other border!" She held up a sweater with a bold red maple leaf on it. "I'm serious, Alba. If this doesn't even things out, I'm done. Kristin glared at her reflection, the frustration bubbling up as she adjusted the scarf draped around her neck. Her brown skin had not lightened at all, her features sharpening into those unmistakably South Asian contours. Her dark, glossy hair framed her face, and her full lips and striking eyebrows screamed one thing: Pakistani. "This is ridiculous," Kristin fumed, turning to Alba, who stood there beaming. The blonde had transformed into a picture-perfect Canadian poster girl—fair, rosy-cheeked, her golden waves cascading down her shoulders. "We're supposed to be Canadian. How on earth do I end up Pakistani-Canadian while you—" she gestured furiously at Alba "—get to stay *perfectly blonde*?" "I mean... technically, Canadians are diverse, right? So this works!" "Oh, it works, alright. For you! Meanwhile, I look like I immigrated yesterday. I bet people are going to ask me where I'm *really* from all day." Alba tried to suppress a laugh but failed, a giggle escaping as she adjusted her maple-leaf sweater. "You always get to be this flawless, Eurocentric version of whatever we try. Look at you! Nobody's going to question your 'Canadian-ness.'"

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Kristin stood by the mirror, tossing a sweater to Alba. "Alright, let's try this next. We're going full Canadian." She held up a sweater with a bold red maple leaf on it. "I'm serious, Alba. If this doesn't even things out, I'm done. Kristin glared at her reflection, the frustration bubbling up as she adjusted the scarf draped around her neck. Her once deep brown skin had lightened to an olive tone, her features sharpening into those unmistakably South Asian contours. Her dark, glossy hair framed her face, and her full lips and striking eyebrows screamed one thing: Pakistani. "This is ridiculous," Kristin fumed, turning to Alba, who stood there beaming. The blonde had transformed into a picture-perfect Canadian poster girl—fair, rosy-cheeked, her golden waves cascading down her shoulders. "We're supposed to be Canadian. How on earth do I end up Pakistani-Canadian while you—" she gestured furiously at Alba "—get to stay *perfectly blonde*?" "I mean... technically, Canadians are diverse, right? So this works!" "Oh, it works, alright. For you! Meanwhile, I look like I immigrated yesterday. I bet people are going to ask me where I'm *really* from all day." Alba tried to suppress a laugh but failed, a giggle escaping as she adjusted her maple-leaf sweater. "You always get to be this flawless, Eurocentric version of whatever we try. Look at you! Nobody's going to question your 'Canadian-ness.'"



Kristin and Alba stood in front of the rack, an outfit catching Kristin's eye immediately. A tailored dress, bold and regal with its Union Jack design, complete with a glittering tiara. "This one's mine," Kristin said quickly, snatching it off the rack before Alba could even glance at it. Alba laughed, shaking her head. "Relax, Kristin. I wasn't even looking at it" she said, picking up a soft pink blouse and trousers.

Kristin ignored her, slipping into the Union Jack outfit and adjusting the tiara. She admired herself in the mirror, her smile growing as she imagined how regal and white she'd look. "This outfit is *the* definition of British. No way this makes me-" She froze mid-sentence, as her voice had shifted, taking on a smooth, refined cadence. It was posh, effortlessly polished, with that unmistakable upper-class British tone. Alba couldn't help but burst into laughter. "Oh my God, Kristin, you sound so posh." Kristin's confidence swelled as she spoke again. "Well, it's about time I got something right with these ridiculous transformations. This voice alone is enough to..." Her words trailed off as she finally opened her eyes, eager to see the blonde-haired, blue-eyed aristocrat she was sure would be staring back at her. But the face she saw wasn't what she expected.



Her skin was a luminous brown, her features elegantly refined—sharp cheekbones, almond-shaped dark eyes. Her glossy, jet-black hair cascaded down her back in sleek waves, framing her face perfectly. She looked every bit the part of an upper-class British-Indian woman, complete with the wealth and sophistication that came with it. Kristin’s voice trembled, still posh as ever. “What... what have I become? This isn’t me! I was supposed to be white—blonde, blue-eyed, *royal!* Not this!” Alba, still struggling to contain her laughter, stepped beside her and placed a hand on Kristin’s shoulder. “Kristin, you look incredible. You’re basically British royalty, just... with a bit of spice.” Kristin glared at her friend, though her new accent made even her anger sound dignified. “This isn’t funny, Alba. This is not what I wanted! This is so unfair,” she muttered, her words clipped and precise, yet still filled with regal frustration. “I wasn’t supposed to be... diverse.”

Alba laughed again, patting her on the back. “Come on, Princess Kristin of Mayfair. Let’s see how the world reacts to your new royal charm.”

They took a cheap flight to London and realized how well they could fit in now. They went to a couple of pubs and Kristin was immediately the center of the attention.



After a while, however, she got bored. This was not who she was supposed to be. They went strolling in a shopping center. The Union Jack dress and tiara still suited her perfectly, her golden-brown complexion glowing under the lights, her sharp features a picture of aristocratic grace. But none of it felt right. She wasn't supposed to be this.

"Let's go back to bases" - the Indian-looking girl said, in her posh British accent. "Why don't we both wear a Norwegian bunad? Think about it, that's how we started!"

"Sure, but, don't you like this? I wouldn't mind being your sidekick. And frankly speaking, Kristin, you got a good hand this time around. You're a stunning British girl of Indian descent. Why not stop here?"

Kristin stared at her manicured brown hands. "I... I don't want to be a British-Indian girl," she admitted, her voice soft. "As cool as it sounds. I want to be Norwegian again. And... and I'd like to at least be able to speak my own language"

Alba gave her a sidelong glance, her smirk unwavering. "Why not?" she said simply, confident that the magic would once again twist in her favor. "Let's go get our bunads."



Kristin adjusted her bunad, taking a deep breath as she waited for the transformation to begin. *This time, I'm going back to being me. Back to being Norwegian.*

Suddenly, a familiar wave of warmth washed over her. Her mind began to clear, and she blinked in surprise as the words in her head naturally shifted. "Jeg kan tenke på norsk igjen!" she exclaimed, the language flowing effortlessly. The joy bubbled up within her, and she laughed in relief. "Endelig! This is it! I'm back!"

But something felt... off. Kristin glanced down at her hands and froze. They were darker—her skin now a deep brown, rich and glowing. Her joy evaporated as she dashed to the mirror. Her heart sank as she watched her reflection change further. Her Indian features sharpened into something even more exotic. Her cheekbones became higher, her nose thinner, her lips fuller and her hairline receded a bit too. Her dark brown hair darkened further and curled into tight, glossy black waves. She stared in horror as her reflection settled—she was no longer Indian-British. She was now *Somali-Norwegian*. "No... no, no, no!" Kristin whispered, her voice rising in panic. She whirled around to face Alba, who was admiring herself in her own reflection.



The transformation had been far kinder to her friend—again. Alba stood there, her fair skin flawless, her blonde hair braided neatly, and her bright blue eyes sparkling with amusement.

Alba turned, and when she saw Kristin, her lips curled into a mischievous smile. “Oh sweetie,” she said with a laugh, placing a hand on her hip. “This makes sense. The Somali-Norwegian community is pretty big, you know.” Kristin’s jaw dropped, clenching her fists. “Nooo! This can’t be true!” she cried, her voice trembling with frustration. She gestured wildly at her reflection. “I... I don’t want to be one of *them*! I’m ethnically Norwegian, for fuck’s sake! This isn’t me!”

Alba burst out laughing, the sound only making Kristin’s frustration boil over. “Kristin, relax! You’re still Norwegian. Just... you know, with a different background.” Kristin glared at her. “A *different background*? Are you kidding me, Alba? I wanted to be blonde, blue-eyed—like *you*! Like I actually am!” Alba raised an eyebrow, her expression unbothered. “Well, you look stunning. Really. You could pass for a supermodel.” Kristin’s hands shot to her face, covering it as she let out a groan of frustration. “I don’t *care* if I look like a supermodel! I’m not supposed to look like this! I’m supposed to look like *me*!”



The African girl took off the bunad and tried on something else, a Chinese qipao. "Anything but this" - she thought. But nothing happened. The Chinese dress contrasted with her East African ancestry. She tried on other outfits, hoping to trigger a new transformation, but nothing worked. "Fuck! I'm stuck looking like this!"

"Kristin, wait! Don't be so dramatic!"

Kristin spun around, her fists clenched. "Dramatic? Alba," Her voice cracked, a mix of anger and panic. "What if it doesn't wear off this time?"

Days passed, then the next day, and nothing changed. Her reflection stayed the same—her Somali features as striking as ever, her tight curls framing her face. Her Norwegian flowed effortlessly, but it only made the reality of her transformation sting more. Her panic turned to resignation, and she sank into a chair, her head in her hands. "I'm stuck," she whispered, her voice hollow. "I don't feel like me, Alba. I feel like a stranger in my own skin."



After a long silence, Alba stood, her posture straightening. "Maybe it's time to stop fighting it," she said "Maybe wearing the same outfit for the second time stopped the curse. I also tried with other dresses and it looks like the magic won't work anymore for me either. But look, this isn't such a bad thing. You're still Norwegian, just in a way you didn't expect. Who knows? Maybe this identity will teach you something."

Kristin didn't reply. She stared at her reflection in the nearby mirror, her dark eyes searching for any trace of the blonde, blue-eyed girl she once was. But she was gone. This was her now. A Somali-Norwegian woman, locked in an identity that wasn't hers but now defined her.

After a long silence, Kristin stood, her posture straightening. "Fine," she said quietly, her Norwegian flawless as always. "If this is who I have to be, then I'll make it work." Alba laughed softly, giving her friend's shoulder a squeeze. "You'll be fine, Kristin!" Kristin forced a small smile, though her heart still ached. She turned back to the mirror one last time and took a deep breath. "I guess I don't have a choice."