

Exchange student

MAY 2024



Alba, a vibrant exchange student from Spain, and Kristin, a reserved local Norwegian student, were a study in contrasts. Alba's outgoing personality and warm, dark complexion were in sharp contrast to Kristin's shy demeanor and blonde hair. Yet, as is often the case, these differences only served to deepen the bond between them, a bond made all the more poignant by the knowledge that their time together was dictated by the fleeting nature of Alba's semester abroad. As the semester drew to a close and the anticipation of Norwegian National Day filled the air, both friends found themselves swept up in the festive mood. Alba was eager to immerse herself fully in Norwegian culture and had her heart set on wearing a traditional Norwegian bunad for the celebrations. She was enchanted by the intricate designs and the beautiful craftsmanship of the bunads she saw in shop windows, but the steep price tags made her dream seem just out of reach. Kristin, understanding Alba's desire and seeing it as a way to deepen their friendship, made a heartwarming offer. "Why don't you wear my bunad?" she suggested one evening as they sat in a cozy Oslo café, sipping on warm drinks. "It would be a pleasure to see you celebrate our national day in traditional attire."

EXCHANGE STUDENT



Alba was touched by the offer. "Really? Are you sure? I would love that!" she exclaimed, her eyes lighting up with gratitude and excitement.

Alba accepted the offer and suggested in return that Kristin should wear her dark, revealing flamenco dress. "Then you must wear my flamenco dress, Kristin! It's only fair," Alba proposed with a twinkle in her eye, excited to share a piece of her own culture. The flamenco dress, with its vibrant and sexy style, contrasted sharply with the more traditional elegance of the bunad. Kristin, who was quite conservative, felt a mix of nervousness and excitement at the suggestion. She thought it would have been almost sacrilegious to wear something like that on the national day but she didn't want to disappoint her friend and saw this as an opportunity to do something different and step out of her comfort zone. "That sounds like fun," she agreed, albeit with a hint of hesitation in her voice. "It will definitely be a new experience!"

On the morning of the national day, Alba dressed in Kristin's bunad. The heavy fabric and detailed embroidery made her feel not only beautiful but deeply connected to the Norwegian culture she had come to love. She admired herself in the mirror, the bunad fitting her surprisingly well, as if it had been made for her.

EXCHANGE STUDENT



Kristin, on the other hand, carefully slipped into Alba's flamenco dress. It had been hanging there for a few days, but Kristin was still a bit skeptical she'd actually wear it. It was just so unlike her... And on national day, of all days, when she was supposed to celebrate her own national pride! What would her family say? On the other hand, they lived in a remote village on the fjords, and they would never know. Also, it was becoming more and more common to see young people wearing diverse outfits on that occasion in the capital city. She tried it on, and the fit was impeccable, hugging her curves and ending just above her ankles, which allowed her to show off her shoes—a striking pair of heels perfect for the outfit. The dress, dark and mysterious, with ruffles fluttering along the hem, transformed her into a figure from a Spanish festival. Kristin felt sexy and adventurous, a stark departure from her usual attire, and she reveled in the change, the flamenco dress infusing her with a sense of boldness and a touch of exotic allure. "Herregud! I look so sexy in this outfit!"

A bit embarrassed, Kristin joined her friends at the parade on the national day, under a cloudy sky. Her exotic dress contrasted strongly with her blonde hair and blue eyes, making her stand out from the crowd of Norwegians wearing bunads mixed with tourists and immigrants wearing casual outfits or their own traditional dresses.

EXCHANGE STUDENT



As Alba and Kristin admired each other in their swapped cultural attire, Alba couldn't help but tease, "Wow, Kristin, I'm speechless! You look much better than me in this! Maybe you should be Spanish, haha!"

"Come on, stop, you're so pretty in my bunad too!" Kristin responded, both of them laughing as they complimented each other. Their conversation continued pleasantly for a while until they each rejoined their respective groups of friends. As they ventured towards the main carousel, mingling into the growing crowd, both received numerous compliments on their outfits and gradually lost sight of each other amid the festivities.

Alba went on, enjoying the parade, getting lost admiring the different outfits, without realising the changes happening to her. Her normally brunette hair began to lighten dramatically, eventually adopting a blonde hue that contrasted strikingly with her darker complexion. People around her began to assume she was Norwegian. At the same time, internal changes were taking place too. She had taken an introductory course in Norwegian but her skills were still low. Today, however, she seemed to be able to understand way more than usual. "My efforts are really paying off!" - she told herself, and even managed to buy soda and a snack speaking in Norwegian from a vendor.



Meanwhile, Kristin experienced her own changes. Her naturally blonde hair darkened minute by minute, eventually settling into a rich brown that matched her flamenco dress perfectly. Despite retaining her blue eyes and distinct facial features, her new hair color gave her a look that aligned more with the Spanish attire. Curiously, she found herself struggling with some Norwegian words—phrases she should have easily understood—attributing this confusion to unfamiliar dialects from remote regions, although it was merely the standard Oslo dialect.

The sun finally appeared through the clouds, with unusual effects on Kristin's skin, which got instantly a couple of shades darker. At first, she assumed it was merely the reflection of her hikes around the lakes north of the city, earlier that week. However, as she glanced down at her hands, she noticed the tan deepening, reaching a golden hue that was distinctly different from her natural color. It was as if the sun was altering her very pigment.

More disconcerting was the change in her stature. Kristin had always been proud of her tall, poised presence. But as the day waned, she felt her perspective shifting—quite literally. The crowd around her seemed to loom taller, the heads in front of her previously at eye level now slightly higher.

EXCHANGE STUDENT



As the day unfolded, Alba's transformation continued its progression. Her skin, once a warm Mediterranean tone, lost pigmentation until it reached a Scandinavian fairness, and her lively brown eyes shifted through shades of green until they settled into a striking ice blue. Even her voice, which once carried the sexy intonations of Spanish, now bore the distinct, song-like sound of a Norwegian accent. She started to notice that her friends glanced around in confusion, their eyes skimming past her without a flicker of recognition. They were calling her name, looking for her in the crowd, their concern growing with every passing minute. Alba tried to respond, to wave her hands, but her calls went unheard, muffled by the festivities and her now foreign voice.

Finally, she caught her reflection in a shop window, and the sight made her gasp aloud. Staring back at her was the epitome of Norwegian beauty—pale skin, blue eyes, blonde hair—completely unlike the brunette woman who had eagerly dressed in a bunad that morning. Panic fluttered through her as she grappled with this new reality. How could this have happened? Was it the magic of the bunad itself?

“Hva faen har skjedd med meg? Huden min er så lys, og er det blondt hår?” (What the heck has happened to me? My skin is so light, and is that blonde hair?) - she exclaimed in Norwegian.

EXCHANGE STUDENT



As the festivities continued, Kristin experienced her own transformation, mirroring Alba's metamorphosis but in reverse. The subtle changes had begun earlier in the day and progressed unnoticed amid the chaos and celebration of the parade. It was only when she paused, feeling a strange sensation of unfamiliarity with her own body, that the reality of her situation began to sink in.

Her typically fair Scandinavian complexion had deepened to a rich olive tone, typically Mediterranean. Her straight blonde hair, once a defining feature, had turned into lush, dark curls that framed her new gracile face beautifully. Even her eyes, once a clear blue, had warmed to a soft brown, completing the transformation into a Mediterranean beauty—a perfect match for the flamenco dress she had borrowed from Alba.

Stunned by the reflection in a nearby mirror, Kristin touched her face, tracing the contours that seemed so alien yet strangely familiar. "¿Cómo? ¿Soy morena?" she uttered in flawless Spanish, her new linguistic ability as surprising as her changed appearance. The words felt natural on her tongue, as if she had spoken them all her life, yet her mind raced with confusion. Her Norwegian identity, once so integral to her being, seemed to have dissolved, replaced by this new persona that matched her outfit not just in style but in spirit.

EXCHANGE STUDENT



Kristin looked around, hoping to find Alba, to share this bewildering experience and perhaps to find solace in the fact that she was not alone in whatever magic had overtaken them. When Alba and Kristin finally reunited amidst the swirling crowds and vibrant celebrations, the contrast between their transformed selves was stark. Alba, now embodying the quintessential Norwegian beauty she had once admired from afar, was radiating a newfound confidence. Kristin, on the other hand, was smaller and more delicate, her features and complexion transformed to mirror the warm, Mediterranean aesthetic of the flamenco dress she wore. The shift in her appearance had brought about a subtle change in their dynamic, with Alba now towering over her in both stature and spirit.

"Look at you, you're so cute!" Alba said, her voice carrying a mix of empathy and excitement. "I don't know about you, but I love it! Well, I guess you can keep my flamenco dress, it definitely fits you more now. I'll keep your bunad if you don't mind. I'm going to wear it every year from now on!" Alba continued, her tone playful yet assertive. "I'll make sure to visit you once you go back to Spain!" she added warmly, hinting that Kristin's destiny was now that of a Spanish exchange girl like she was.

EXCHANGE STUDENT



While Alba happily accepted her new destiny and enjoyed life as a Kristin, now breathing in Alba's body, sounding like her, seeing the world through her brown doe eyes, was on the verge of a mental breakdown. Desperate to regain her former self, she pleaded with Alba to swap outfits in a bid to reverse their transformation. But Alba, unwilling to risk losing the excitement and adventure of living as someone else, dismissed the idea. "It's kind of fun and thrilling, don't you think? Experiencing life as each other?" she said, shrugging off Kristin's concerns.

For Kristin, this was no adventure. She felt deprived of her own life, trapped in a new body and identity that didn't feel like her own. To numb the sense of loss and confusion, she threw herself into student parties, drowning her pain in alcohol and distraction.

When the exchange period ended, Kristin, still stuck in Alba's body, had no choice but to leave Norway and move to Spain, a country she had never set foot in but was now legally obligated to call home. The change was jarring, but there was a small comfort in finding she could express herself easily in what was now her native tongue.

EXCHANGE STUDENT



Alba, now settled into Kristin's body and relieved that her friend had departed without successfully reclaiming her original appearance, was thriving. With the magical bunad safely stored, there was no risk of anyone stealing the new life she'd secured for herself. She was living it up as Kristin, fully embracing her identity and lifestyle.

As she explored Kristin's world, she discovered that her new family was wealthier than she had anticipated. Their influential connections opened doors to exclusive circles, placing her among the wealthiest young men in the country. She quickly set her sights on Thorbjørn, a handsome blonde who stood out among the crowd.

With her newly acquired bubbly, jovial personality, Alba charmed Thorbjørn with ease, wrapping him around her little finger. Her infectious energy and confidence quickly drew him in, and it wasn't long before he was utterly captivated by her. In Kristin's body, Alba navigated social events effortlessly, relishing every moment of her new life. She found herself welcomed warmly into elite circles and knew she could maintain this exciting identity for as long as she desired.

EXCHANGE STUDENT



A couple of years later, Alba had settled into her new identity, working at a beachfront bar to support herself during the summer break. She had lost contact with the friend who had betrayed her, and with no way to regain her original life, she gave up on any hopes to reclaim her true identity and started navigating life as an attractive, if somewhat introverted young Spanish woman. She appeared quieter than normal, and people around her joked that she had become a little Norwegian after her stay in Oslo. She always cringed at these comments, knowing how true they really were. In the meanwhile, endless hours under the sun had deepened her tan, complementing her features and giving her an even darker complexion.

One sunny afternoon, while serving drinks to tourists, she suddenly froze. There, laughing and holding hands with her fiancé, Thorbjørn, stood the fake Kristin. The sight of her former friend was shocking, especially in the company of Thorbjørn—a man Alba had secretly crushed on before her own identity was taken away. Seeing them together, so blissfully unaware of her presence, gave her a pang of jealousy. Apparently, the faux Kristin was feeling nostalgic and had returned to Spain for her holiday, something that wasn't unusual for Norwegians.

EXCHANGE STUDENT



The blonde girl, Alba, approached the brunette, Kristin, and greeted her cheerfully, despite the underlying tension. Kristin, barely restraining her anger, clenched her fists, tempted to punch Alba. The blonde, sensing this, quickly suggested they meet the following day for a walk downtown. Kristin breathed deeply to calm her nerves. Maybe Alba came here to offer her a way out of this situation, a way back to her life. Maybe she was tired of her new life and wanted to switch back.

"Listen, Kristin," Alba began, acknowledging her former friend's true identity, "I know what I've done to you has been unfair, but I'm here to make amends, okay?"

Kristin's eyes narrowed, her voice dripping with sarcasm and hurt. "You stole my life, my boyfriend, and now you want to be friends again? How dare you show up like this!"

"I know, I have been a terrible person. This is why I decided to share something with you." - the blonde replied, in a serious tone.

EXCHANGE STUDENT



"Like what?" - asked Kristin, suddenly more curious than angry.

Diverting Kristin's questions, Alba gained some time and guided her to an apartment she had rented in town. The first thing the brunette noticed was that plenty of colorful dresses were hanging from around the room, of all attires and fabrics.

Alba's tone shifted. "I've done some research," she said, "and collected more dresses with the same magical powers that changed us. I have a full collection of ethnic dresses from all over the world. With these we can turn ourself into women of any ethnicity! And keep in mind that this is just a small selection I carried with me!"

Kristin's skepticism was evident, but curiosity got the better of her. "Are you serious? Do they all really work?"

"Absolutely. Do you want to try on one?" Alba asked, handing Kristin a vibrant Indian saree with a smirk while she selected a traditional Chinese qipao for herself.

"What kind of costumes are these?" - the brunette asked, unfamiliar with the textures and clothes.

EXCHANGE STUDENT



"You'll see" - the blonde replied, disrobing. Kristin stared at what used to be her body for a moment. It had been so long since she last saw it and she had to admit Alba took great care of it. She had never been so fit. "Maybe this is for the best" - she found herself thinking. "Maybe Alba is indeed using my body to its fullest."

As they donned the dresses, the transformation began. Alba's nordic features softened into delicate East Asian contours, her skin getting a tan, her blue eyes becoming brown and slanted, epicanthic folds forming, until she looked 100% Han Chinese. Meanwhile, Kristin's olive skin darkened to a warm brown, and gained exotic Indian features, while her hair curled into lush black waves. Her nose elongated and gained a small bump she now noticed was often associated with Indian people. This was not the transformation she had in mind. She looked even less like her true self. Yet, there was hope that things would change for her in the future.

Alba examined her friend, now transformed into an Indian beauty, a mischievous glint in her eyes. "We could have so much fun with this! Don't you think so" she exclaimed, her excitement palpable.

EXCHANGE STUDENT



Kristin, still in awe of her new appearance, hesitated before replying, "I don't know what to say... I was so angry at you, but if we could share this power together, it could actually be fun!"

Alba grinned, "Let's try out some more outfits and get ready for tonight!"

Without missing a beat, Alba slipped into a traditional German dirndl, her features shifting until she resembled a charming German girl with blonde braids and rosy cheeks. Kristin, on the other hand, donned a hijab, her transformation turning her into a graceful Arab woman with dark, expressive eyes and modest attire.

Kristin glanced at herself in the mirror, noting her darker complexion with a hint of frustration. "How come I always end up with the darker complexion while you stay fair?"

Alba, now the picture of a fair-skinned, brunette German girl, smiled slyly. "I like to keep it that way. I think darker colors suit you more." she replied, her tone light but firm.

EXCHANGE STUDENT



Kristin sighed, then asked, "Can I at least have something more suited for a party?"

Without hesitation, Alba handed her a traditional Syrian dress, beautifully embroidered, leaving her head free and her neckline gracefully exposed. Kristin's appearance shifted once again, this time into a captivating Syrian woman, her features striking and alluring, perfect for a night out.

"There," Alba said, adjusting her own dirndl with a satisfied smile. "Now we're both ready to turn heads tonight."

Kristin admired her reflection, a smile tugging at her lips. "Not bad," she commented, turning to Alba with a newfound confidence. "I could live like this, changing looks every once in a while!"

Alba chuckled, adjusting her curly hair. "You see? We could really have some fun with this power, if we play it right." Kristin nodded, her earlier resentment fading away, replaced by a sense of excitement and curiosity. "I guess I'm ready for whatever comes next."