

# Crisp(er) consequences

DECEMBER 2024

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Dr. Kimberly Wells was the picture of a classic British female academic. At 38, she was not what one would call hot; she was cute but her attractiveness was muted by her sensible wardrobe of grey outfits and buttoned blouses. She had medium-length light brown hair that used to be blonde in her youth but had lost its shine, and blue eyes that would be pretty if not hidden behind glasses. She was polished but uptight, and had an air of serious dedication that bordered on dullness, a reputation she was well aware of but didn't seem to bother her. It wasn't that Kimberly didn't care for connection; she was simply more comfortable with controlled environments and predictable outcomes—qualities that also made her an exceptional researcher.

She was married with Alex, a British electronic engineer and had no kids.

She had grown up in a rather conservative family from Kent and lived in London since her college years. After so many years in the city, however, she was no stranger to diversity. Her students ranged across nationalities, with many hailing from Chinese expatriate backgrounds or second-generation Indian and Bangladeshi Londoners.

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One of Dr. Wells's students was Anaya Rahman, a young British undergrad of Bangladeshi descent with the nervous energy and determination of someone trying to succeed and blend in at all costs. Anaya was short, with thick black hair and pretty brown eyes. She was low-key cute but her insecurities hampered her natural charm. Intelligent and kind, Anaya was an easy target for teasing; the popular kids, mostly white but also Asian and Hispanic, at Imperial College targeted her and dismissed her as a try-hard, only increasing her determination to succeed and prove herself. Anaya simply accepted her place in society. She was a self-proclaimed geek who wore her nerdiness like a badge of honor and didn't do much to break out of the stereotype. She dreamt of one day making a significant contribution to genetics, of doing something that mattered, even if it meant enduring a bit of ridicule on the way.

Together, Kimberly and her students worked tirelessly on a project that used CRISPR technology to modify the DNA of patients to cure genetic diseases, possibly even life-threatening conditions. The device they were developing needed live testing, so they used a sample that would link a user's DNA with that of a subject.

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One afternoon, Dr. Kimberly Wells decided it was time to do a live demonstration of CRISPR's power for her students. She planned to modify a batch of human skin cells in vitro, visibly altering their pigmentation by switching DNA from one person to another. Searching for a volunteer, her gaze landed on Anaya, the timid student who lingered at the back of the group, watching with interest. Her darker skin tone would make the change even more visible.

"Anaya, would you like to help us out here?" Kimberly asked with a warm smile, encouraging the shy yet brilliant girl to step forward. Anaya hesitated, glancing nervously at her classmates, but nodded, barely meeting Kimberly's eye. She allowed Kimberly to take a small DNA sample, and they placed it in the device.

"Watch carefully," Kimberly instructed, her voice full of excitement as she guided Anaya through each step. "We'll be replacing my DNA with yours—see here? It should alter the pigmentation of these skin cells I have grown from a small sample of my own skin and show us just how fast DNA can overwrite traits, like skin color." As they initiated the modification, the batch of skin cells quickly darkened, taking on a rich brown hue. Anaya's eyes widened in wonder, as she watched her DNA override Kimberly's cells.

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"See that? Quite powerful, isn't it?" Kimberly said with a hint of pride, turning to her student. "Have a try!"

Encouraged, Anaya tried her hand, stepping up to the device. All the other students were staring at her with a mix of amusement and envy, and her nerves got the best of her. She fumbled with the controls, and suddenly, the machine emitted a small burst of energy, directing its focus on them both instead of the contained sample. Kimberly reacted first, switching off the power button. Startled, they jumped back as the machine powered down. Anaya's face paled, and she looked up at Kimberly, horrified. "I'm so sorry, Dr. Wells! I didn't mean to—". Some of the other students erupted in a laughter. Kimberly brushed it off, offering a reassuring smile. "Don't worry, Anaya. Lab accidents happen all the time. Besides, the good news is it could be much worse." She gave the girl's shoulder a comforting squeeze. "Fortunately, we were working with some in vitro cells, not with our own DNA!"

Anaya was extremely mortified but grateful for Kimberly's kindness. They had no idea that the machine had, indeed, altered their DNA. The professor tried to hide her concerns but that was a serious lack of safety measures. Hopefully, nobody would report her for her misconduct. After all, the responsibility was hers.

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Kimberly drove home after the demonstration, feeling a little off. When her husband, Alex, saw her, he was taken aback. He looked her over, raising an eyebrow. "Wow, trying out a new look, are we?" he asked, clearly amused. "I'm not complaining, but that's...unexpected."

Kimberly blinked, her confusion growing. "What do you mean?"

"Okay, I get it. This is because I never notice your haircuts, right?" Alex said with a chuckle. "I mean, you've got a tan—which, given the week we've had, I'm guessing you got from a salon. And the brown contacts! They're very convincing, actually."

Kimberly forced a laugh, even as a gnawing worry took root. "Oh, yes! Just thought I'd surprise you." She swallowed hard, trying to keep her voice steady. "Let me, uh, freshen up my makeup." She rushed to the bathroom, her mind racing. *No. No way. This couldn't be happening.* She closed the door and stared into the mirror. Her blue eyes were now a light brown. And her skin looked different too, she couldn't deny the warm brown tone spreading across her cheeks and arms. Anaya's genes were starting to show.

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Meanwhile, across town, Anaya lay on her bed, her stomach churning with worry. Ever since she'd left the lab, she'd felt off. Her skin seemed unnaturally pale, probably from the big scare, she thought. But it wouldn't go away. She stared at the ceiling, replaying the disastrous lab demonstration in her mind. She'd made a fool of herself, fumbled in front of everyone. Maybe she should cancel her plans, save herself the embarrassment, and sleep off the shame. A tear rolled down her cheek.

Her phone buzzed with a message from a friend: *"Can't wait to see you tonight! Party starts at 8!"* She hesitated, caught between happiness at the invitation and her urge to hide. It was rare for her to be invited to a party though.

Still feeling unsettled, she dragged herself to the bathroom to check her reflection before getting dressed. Staring back at her was a girl she barely recognized, her skin was far lighter than usual, just a bit tanned rather than brown. Her wide brown eyes were gone, replaced by exotic blue-green ones, and her cheekbones and jawline had taken on a more delicate shape. She looked mixed or even fully white. "Oh no!" Anaya whispered, her heart pounding. "I have Professor Wells's DNA! I'm... I'm turning into a younger version of her!"

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Anaya checked prof. Wells's website looking for her phone number and dialed it. After a few rings, she heard Kimberly's voice, professional as usual. "I'm sorry, I'm a bit busy right now" "Professor Wells, it's me, Anaya! Something terrible is happening! I think the device..." "Anaya! Are you noticing pigmentation changes too?" "Yes..." the girl replied, almost in tears. "I'm so sorry, Professor, I messed everything up and now you must have my complexion..." Anaya, don't mention it," Kimberly said firmly. "I was in charge. Now, where do you live? I need to come by and check on you."

Kimberly hung up and turned to her husband, clearly amused by her "new look." She muttered something about an emergency at the university before rushing out the door. As she drove, the changes progressed, her skin darkening to a deep brown hue and her hair turning black. Arriving at Anaya's building, she found the door to her flat slightly ajar and stepped inside. "Anaya?" she called, her voice echoing in the small space, sounding a little off. Anaya was hiding in the bathroom, unable to bring herself to face the professor. She felt guilty, afraid of what Kimberly would say, and terrified of how she now looked. When the two women finally came face-to-face, they froze. The South Asian woman sitting on the sofa looked like a stranger, only Kimberly's signature outfit made it possible to recognize her.

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"Professor Wells?" - she asked, her voice altered too. "Anaya?"

Kimberly's heart skipped as she realized how much her student had changed too. Her eyes were a light blue, her skin porcelain with a faint blush, her hair blonde, and her face softened and reshaped. "Oh my God, Anaya," Kimberly said, swallowing hard. "You're... you're white."

"How are you feeling?" The now brown-skinned professor reached out instinctively, touching Anaya's forehead, checking for any sign of fever or distress. Anaya looked away, her face flushing in embarrassment. "I feel fine now," Anaya replied, biting her lip. "But I'm... I'm so sorry, Professor. I didn't mean for this to happen. I feel terrible. I gave you my dark skin, and I stole yours I'm... fair and beautiful."

"That's irrelevant, Anaya," she said, dismissing her student's concerns. "The most important thing is that you're healthy and stable. We're lucky the change was quick enough to avoid major issues while our cells were in the middle of rewriting themselves." She paused. "The problem is that I did something really wrong and I might be radiated by the University. But that's also secondary." "Professor Wells, you should never pay for this! It was my mistake, not yours. You can't take the blame for me."

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Kimberly held up a hand, silencing her gently. "Anaya, listen to me. As your professor, I'm responsible. You only did what I asked. I'll deal with the university". Both women fell silent, the weight of their shared responsibility pressing heavily on them.

"So," Anaya began cautiously, "I got your DNA, and you got mine?" "Yes."

"And I look like... you did at my age, and vice versa?" Kimberly sighed. "Yeah, more or less. Our bone structure didn't change, but as far as soft tissue goes, yes." She paused, looking at Anaya with mild concern. "Do you have any medical conditions I should know about?"

"No... I'm healthy, just a bit short-sighted."

"Yeah, I noticed my glasses aren't sufficient anymore."

"Professor Wells, why is my hair blonde? I remember your hair was brown."

"I was blonde at your age," she replied, touching the black strands of her new hair. "It darkened as I got older." - the woman replied, realizing how ironic it was saying that since her hair was now jet black.

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Kimberly went to the bathroom to ring the dean and came back in a few minutes.

“Listen, I explained the situation to him. There are... implications. If word got out that a student at Imperial College was, well, ‘whitewashed’ as a result of a lab accident, the university’s credibility would be irreparably damaged. After Brexit, we’ve already lost so many international students. If this leaked, we’d be a laughingstock. To avoid that, the university has agreed to offer you a substantial financial settlement on the condition that you don’t sue or speak publicly about what happened. Additionally, you’ll be issued a new student ID, under the name Ann Rayleigh. You would attend classes as... well, as a new student.”

Anaya swallowed, processing the idea of living under a new identity. “Of course,” she said quietly. “I’ll accept it if it means I can protect you and the university. But... what about you?”

Kimberly looked down for a moment, then met Anaya’s gaze. “Professor Kimberly Wells will be officially transferred to the University of Sydney.” She smiled slightly, though there was a hint of sadness behind it. “Here, I’ll begin a new role as Kutsiya Khan, a British-Bangladeshi geneticist. Not a professor though, just a researcher.” “I’m sorry”. “It’s ok, it’s a small price to pay.”

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Kimberly had one more person to talk to, her husband. She came back home, looking nothing like herself anymore.

"Babe, I'm back home. There's something I need to tell you though. Please, don't freak out. There's been a lab accident, I'm fine but I... look different, I have the DNA of one of my students. I have been changing all day." - she told him, calling him by phone.

"Wow, ok. So that was no tan and contacts, earlier?"

"No. And I have changed more."

A moment later, she opened the front door, and Alex's jaw dropped. "Holy...! That's... that's insane! You look... fully Indian."

"Bengali," she corrected him, stepping inside. She explained the whole accident, sparing none of the details.

"Is there... any chance the device could swap you back?"

"The apparatus is being declared unsafe and decommissioned. I'm afraid this is it."

"It's alright. I'll support and love you, no matter what."

"Aww, Alex!" She smiled, feeling an unexpected warmth bubble up as he held her close.

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"But we need to be more open and closer now. From now on, please tell me everything, alright?" Alex said gently. Kimberly nodded. "Oh, and one more thing, this new persona you'll be should be different from you. We don't want anyone picking up that my 'new partner' has the same taste and personality as my ex-wife. It'd be too suspicious. And we might start from the looks."

Kimberly sighed "I guess you're right!". "What do you have in mind?"

Kimberly was reluctantly taken by Alex to a trendy beauty parlor she'd never have chosen on her own. She felt uncomfortable but she understood she needed to find a compromise to make her sudden change in looks palatable to her husband. She sat down in a cushy chair, watching her reflection as a young assistant draped a black robe over her shoulders. Meanwhile, Alex was talking to the beautician, a poised Asian woman in her 30s, who nodded at his suggestions, occasionally casting thoughtful glances in Kimberly's direction.

"Nothing too drastic, right?" - she asked the lady, nervous, when she came. She nodded, gently removed Kimberly's glasses, placing them to the side, and began by applying a skincare mask to her new brown skin.

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Kimberly could feel the gentle tugging and combing as the beautician worked on her hair, and she couldn't help but wonder what look they were creating for her. After about fifteen minutes, they removed the mask and began focusing on her face, shaping her brows meticulously, applying a mild skin lightener to bring out the warmth of her complexion, and layering on makeup with precision. The chair was positioned away from the mirror, keeping her new look hidden from view. All she could sense was the softness of her now wavy hair and the subtle scents of makeup and skincare products blending in the air.

Finally, after what felt like ages, the beautician stepped back and smiled, her eyes sparkling with satisfaction. "Alright, you're ready."

When the chair turned, Kimberly found herself staring at a woman she could barely recognize. The woman in the mirror had a luminous complexion with a slightly lighter tone, which made her dark eyes stand out even more. Heavy makeup emphasized her high cheekbones and full lips, lending her an almost Bollywood starlet-like glamor, and her hair was now styled into soft black curls that framed her face with a gentle elegance.

"You look five years younger now," the beautician laughed, clearly pleased with her work. "Why hide yourself away like that? You've got such beautiful features!"

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"I guess you're right... Wow, I do look younger! What was that?"

"Just some skincare and cosmetics, I'll give you a sample of the products we used on you in case you're interested."

"Where are my glasses?" - the brown lady asked, forced to be only one or two feet from the mirror.

The beautician gave her a gentle smile and held out a case. "Why don't you try these contacts instead? They'll complement your new look perfectly." As she placed the lenses in her eyes, Alex returned, holding up a striking red cocktail dress. Kimberly stared at it, feeling a mix of nerves and disbelief. "Why don't you put this on?" he said with a grin, handing her the dress.

Kimberly adjusted the dress, tugging at the fabric nervously, her heart pounding. She caught her reflection, hardly recognizing the woman in the mirror: her warm brown skin, the soft black curls framing her face, and eyes that weren't her own.

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"Wow, are you sure all of this is necessary? The contacts, the makeup and this dress! Isn't it... a bit too much?" she asked, a touch of uncertainty in her voice.

Alex leaned in, a smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth. "You're stunning," he said, his voice warm. Alex placed his hands reassuringly on her shoulders. "Kutsiya, don't be shy! We talked about this—you'll be introduced to my parents as my new fiancée. You need to make a good impression! You should dress like a young woman in her 30s, not a middle aged professor!"

"Alright," Kutsiya said, her voice firm. "Let's do this."

That evening, they arrived at the restaurant. Kutsiya felt her pulse quicken as they stepped through the front door, her heels clicking against the polished floor. Meeting Alex's family again—this time as "Kutsiya"—was as nerve-wracking as Kutsiya had imagined, if not more. Her stomach churned; she knew his parents had barely tolerated her when she was Kimberly. His mother had subtly, and sometimes not-so-subtly, encouraged him to end their marriage. Now, looking like a Bollywood actress, she hoped they wouldn't sense even a hint of familiarity.

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The atmosphere was heavy as they entered the restaurant, where his parents waited, eyeing her with quiet curiosity. Alex introduced her, giving them the story they had rehearsed—how things hadn't worked out with Kimberly and how he had found a fresh start with "Kutsiya," a new friend who had quickly become his partner. They exchanged greetings, and as they sat, she could feel their eyes appraising her from head to toe, especially her mother-in-law's. She couldn't help but notice the older woman's faint smile of relief. *Probably glad Kimberly is officially out of her son's life*, Kimberly thought wryly, holding back an eye roll.

"So," Alex's father began, his eyes narrowing thoughtfully, "Alex mentioned you grew up here?" "Yes," she replied, her voice calm and polished, despite her nerves.

"Fourth generation. My great-grandparents moved to Kent from Bangladesh." They looked taken aback. "You sound like you've spent your life reading Austen aloud!" Alex's father remarked, a touch of surprise in his voice. "Much more refined English than most people around here." - Alex's mother commented. "Especially the youngsters" - Alex's father added.

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She allowed herself a small smile. "Thank you, I am British though. I grew up in Kent," she said. "Though, not everyone is able to see past the surface. Some people, still find it hard to treat me as 'one of them.'" Alex's mother, who had once barely disguised her distaste for Kimberly, now looked on her with newfound sympathy. "How terrible," she murmured. "It must be exhausting, feeling like you're never fully accepted." "It's... complicated," Kimberly replied, sensing that they wanted a more personal story. She decided to lean into it. "Growing up, I was often seen as too 'white' by my family's community. I don't speak Bengali, and there's this phrase I've heard before—'coconut,' white on the inside, brown on the outside. It's hard to fit in fully anywhere."

Oddly, this family, which had once been so critical of her as Kimberly, was now looking at her with something close to affection. She smirked internally; *they're falling for this*, she thought.

When dinner was served, his parents seemed hesitant. The table was set with ham and a fine bottle of wine, and Kimberly could feel their discomfort, wondering if she would refuse the meal.

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She smiled reassuringly. "No worries, please. I grew up on pork and wine—I don't have any special requirements."

Alex's mother looked relieved, and even a bit impressed. "It's so wonderful that you've embraced the culture here so well, Kutsiya," she said, her voice almost affectionate. Kimberly just nodded, taking a sip of wine, her heart calm now that she knew she had them.

"You seem so nice, Kutsy" Alex's mother said, mispronouncing her new name with an affectionate smile. "I tell you, Alex's ex was such a bore!"

Kimberly felt her face flush. "I heard she was a distinguished professor," she replied carefully, feeling an odd twist of embarrassment.

Alex's mother scoffed. "More like a professional bore!"

Kimberly hid her smile behind her wine glass, thinking, *If only they knew.*

In the car ride home, Kimberly exhaled deeply, her head leaning back against the seat. "That was exhausting," she muttered. "But... I think it went well." Alex glanced over, a proud smile on his face. "You were perfect. They adored you."

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For Anaya—now Anna—the transformation was far from smooth. Though her DNA had changed, the shy, geeky girl she had always been lingered in her demeanor, sticking to her quiet routines and her modest, practical wardrobe.

Anaya's old bullies were amused by the sudden disappearance of the nerd brown girl they used to bully - "They probably didn't renew her visa because she wasn't even that good as a student anyway, haha" - they said.

Looking for a new victim, they noticed the new blonde girl with glasses but they didn't target her as much compared to her old life, she only got the odd "nerd" thrown her way, partially because their leader, a redhead girl named Sheila, was something of a racist and loved bullying students with an immigrant background.

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They decided she would be the perfect replacement for Anaya to do their assignment, since they had no time for boring stuff like that. Anna accepted her old role, glad that they at least weren't picking on her that much anymore.

It wasn't until she noticed subtle changes in how others responded to her that things began to shift for Anna. Her longtime crush, a fellow student of mixed heritage she had admired from afar, suddenly seemed to notice her more.

He'd catch her eye in class, smile in the hallway, start small conversations that left her heart racing. Encouraged by Kutsiya, Anna began to experiment with her look. She swapped her geeky girl outfits for pink sweaters first and more revealing tops and slim-fit jeans later. She added a touch of makeup too. Gradually, her style evolved into something chic yet understated, all while maintaining her focus on academics.

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Months later, her crush invited her to a party. She reached out to Kutsiya for advice.

"Another night out?" Kutsiya teased over the phone. "You're becoming quite the social butterfly."

"Not really" Anna said, nervous and excited. "But... I think I want to show a bit more of the confident side. Not too much."

"Leave it to me," Kutsiya replied. "Come over, and we'll make sure you're ready."

At Kutsiya's flat, Anna found herself in the familiar chair in front of the mirror. Though Anna's natural beauty required little enhancement, Kutsiya showed her how to use makeup to highlight her new features. With a completely different color palette to work with, Anna's limited experience with cosmetics was now irrelevant. Her hair was styled in loose waves that framed her face effortlessly. She slipped into a simple but elegant dress that hugged her figure just enough to feel sophisticated.

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Heads turned, and the buzz of conversation quieted briefly when she walked in. The evening was filled with light-hearted conversation, laughter, and shared stories. Her confidence grew as she realized she could feel comfortable in any setting, her charm shining through in her party attire..

Her crush found her quickly, offering her a drink. They talked, laughed, and at one point, he leaned in closer, looking into her eyes. "You know," he said softly, "you look beautiful without your glasses." Anna's cheeks flushed. She looked down, smiling shyly. "Thank you, I tried contacts for once!" she managed, her heart fluttering.

That night, walking home, she felt a rush of emotions. She couldn't help but smile, thinking of herself as Cinderella—revealing her beauty for a fleeting midnight, only to return to her unassuming life as a diligent student.

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The following day, Anna sat in the university library, tapping away at her laptop. It was a quiet afternoon, and the usual crowd of students shuffled between desks, their heads buried in books. A familiar group of her former tormentors came in, laughing loudly in the quiet library.

“Hey, nerd!” one of them called out, swaggering over to her desk. “Need you to help us with this assignment. You’re, like, a genius, right?”

Anna gave them a polite smile, suppressing a laugh. She had always found it amusing how oblivious they were. These were the same students who used to tease and take advantage of her when she was Anaya. Now, they saw her as the university’s blonde geeky girl.

One of the girls leaned in, her tone conspiratorial. “You know, there was this Indian girl here before you, Anaya or something. She used to do all our assignments. Total geek.”

Anna raised an eyebrow, keeping her expression neutral.

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"Oh? Sounds like she was helpful," she said, fighting back a grin.

"Yeah" another one, the chimed in, shaking their head, "Anyway, she must've dropped out or something. They probably took away her visa, haha! Now we're stuck with you."

Anna chuckled inwardly, enjoying the irony. They had no idea that the "geeky Indian girl" they once bossed around was now sitting in front of them. She relished the thought of continuing this quiet deception, showing them up academically during the day and watching them envy her as the "blonde bombshell".

"Well," she said, sliding their notes back toward them, "I'm happy to help you stay on top of your work."

They laughed, clearly missing the sarcasm in her voice. "That's what we like about you, Anna. You're a good girl. See you later, loser!"

Anna smirked as they walked away, shaking her head. *If only they knew.*

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Kutsiya became a star at university as well, and she eventually finds out that as a Bangladeshi professor way more people notice her. She was up for more funding and media coverage as a trailblazing "diverse" woman in science.

As word spread, Kutsiya began receiving invitations to conferences, press events, and even radio interviews, all eager to feature her as an inspiring figure in the world of science and a champion for diversity. She was called upon to discuss her "unique" perspective on the challenges faced by women and minorities in STEM fields. Journalists often leaned in with extra interest, hungry for sound bites on her experiences, the obstacles she'd supposedly overcome, and her advice for young women of color aspiring to enter academia.

Yet, with all the exposure came a trade-off. Between public appearances, interviews, and diversity panels, she found her time for actual research dwindling. Her lab hours shrank, and the very work she was so passionate about often took a back seat to the spotlight she now occupied. She had become a glorified diversity speaker now, with little time left to be a dedicated researcher.

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Kutsiya had embraced her new identity fully, and part of that transformation included taking care of her body in ways she never had as Kimberly. She joined a gym and enrolled in a special aerobics program designed to keep her toned, lithe, yet with curves in all the right places. The routines focused heavily on her glutes and thighs, sculpting a figure that turned heads wherever she went.

Though her old glasses were now practically useless, she sometimes wore them for fun. After a grueling workout, sweat glistening on her skin, she'd slip them on and snap a quick selfie, her hair slightly tousled, her toned body glowing with post-exercise energy. She'd send it to Alex with a playful caption: *\*Look who just crushed leg day.\**



The response was always immediate and enthusiastic, setting the tone for their evenings. Those selfies weren't just for show—they were an appetizer for nights of wild passion, where Alex couldn't get enough of his new wife. Their connection had only deepened with her transformation, and the spark between them burned hotter than ever. Kutsiya found herself reveling in both her newfound confidence and the unshakable bond they shared.

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Thanks to her looks, to Kutsiya's surprise, she began receiving invitations to student parties. At 38, she could still pull off outfits that the students—half her age—wore. Her daring style didn't go unnoticed. One day, during a departmental meeting, one of the older women on the faculty, a stern head of department known for her strict adherence to rules, pulled Kutsiya aside. "You know, Professor Khan," the woman said, her tone disapproving, "your outfits are rather... casual. You're violating the university's dress code." Kutsiya smirked, unfazed. "Oh, I thought that was just for students," she quipped, laughing it off.

At parties, Kutsiya often found herself the center of attention. Her striking looks, from her flawless complexion to her soft black curls, outshone most of the female students. Many of the younger men couldn't resist trying their luck, approaching her with attempts at flirting.

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“Professor Khan,” one particularly bold student said at a party, his cheeks flushed from the alcohol, “I think you’re the most beautiful woman here. You must know that, right?”

Kutsiya chuckled, raising an eyebrow. “I appreciate the compliment,” she said with a playful smile, “but you should know—I’m married. And I’m old enough to be your mum.”

The student blushed furiously, stammering an apology, and Kutsiya patted him on the shoulder. “Enjoy the party,” she said, turning away with a laugh. As soon as she walked away, the student rejoined his friends, who greeted him with wide grins. “What a MILF,” he whispered, and his friends cheered him for his audacity.

Despite their occasional advances, the students adored her, both for her intellect and her charm. Kutsiya walked a fine line between being a role model and an enigmatic presence, and she reveled in the balance, knowing she had captured their respect and admiration in equal measure.

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Sheila, however, had noticed something. Anna lived at the same place as the brown Anaya, even her handwriting was identical—she still had some of Anaya’s old notes from class. It didn’t take long for her to put the pieces together, especially after recalling the DNA-swapping device Anaya had worked on. Smirking with newfound power, Sheila cornered Anna after a lecture.

“I know your secret,” she said, her voice dripping with malice. “You’re Anaya. I don’t know how you pulled this off, but I know about the device. Imagine what would happen if I told the dean—or the press. Both you and your precious Professor Khan would be finished.”

Anna’s face went pale, her usual confidence shattered. She rushed to Kutsiya that evening, tears streaming down her face. Between sobs, she spilled everything, her voice trembling as she recounted Sheila’s threat. “She’ll ruin us,” Anna whispered. “She’s got proof.”

Kutsiya listened intently, her face calm. After a moment of silence, she placed a reassuring hand on Anna’s shoulder. “Don’t worry,” she said firmly. “I’ll handle Sheila.”

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The next day, Kutsiya approached Sheila under the guise of discussing her midterm performance. "Sheila," Kutsiya said with a composed smile, "I think we should meet in the lab after class. I've reviewed your exams, and I'd like to go over some areas where you could improve."

Sheila agreed, suspicious by the unusual request and bothered by the perspective of missing precious time before the midterm party that evening.

Later that evening, the lab was quiet except for the faint hum of machinery. Sheila sauntered in, already in her party attire to save time. "Alright, Professor Khan, let's cut this short," she said, leaning against a desk. "Let's talk about my grades, or maybe we should talk about Anaya?"

Kutsiya gave a faint smile and gestured toward the DNA machine in the corner. "Oh, we'll talk, Sheila. But first, I'd like to show you something." She moved to the device, casually placing her own DNA sample into the slot. Then, with a controlled calm, she added Sheila's. "You know" Kutsiya said, her voice almost conversational, "I could always use a niece."

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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Sheila raised an eyebrow, suddenly uneasy. "What are you talking about?"

Kutsiya's smile didn't falter. "Plus," she added, her tone growing colder, "you really shouldn't have called Anaya a 'Bengali bitch.'"

Before Sheila could react, Kutsiya activated the machine. A soft hum filled the room, and Sheila screamed in terror. She reacted quickly, avoiding being hit by the bulk of the radiations, although she still received a small dose. The machine powered down, leaving the room in silence.

"You crazy bitch! That's it?" Sheila sneered. "Nice try, but I'm fine."

Kutsiya merely shrugged. "You can go now, Sheila. I'm sure you'll feel the effects soon enough. By the end of the week, you'll be a much different girl. Kinder, more understanding. And a good friend to Anaya."

Sheila stormed out, muttering under her breath. She had a party to attend that night, and she wasn't about to let Kutsiya's little stunt ruin her mood.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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At the party, Sheila was the center of attention as usual. She grabbed a drink and started mingling, but soon, people began to notice something different.

"Hey, Sheila," one of her friends said, squinting at her. "Are you wearing color contacts?"

Sheila blinked, confused. "What? No."

"Sheila, your eyes are brown! They actually look good on you, though."

Sheila laughed lightly, brushing it off. "Oh, I'm sure it's just the lighting," she said, waving her hand dismissively. "Shit, I probably got a small dosage of the radiations and my eyes got changed! I hope they aren't too dark!"

The group nodded, accepting her explanation, and the conversation shifted to other topics. Sheila tried to focus, but the comment nagged at her throughout the night. She didn't even want to see for herself.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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Later that night, back at home, Sheila stood in front of her bathroom mirror, ready to wash up before bed. She leaned closer to the mirror, her heart skipping a beat.

Her eyes were very much brown. A dark brown you didn't often see in white girls. It looked completely out of place in her otherwise British face.

Sheila's breath quickened as she touched her face, inspecting every inch for more changes. Her mind raced back to Kutsiya's smug expression. *You'll feel the effects soon enough.*

"Noo, my beautiful eyes! I look so dull!" she cried out, shaking her head in disbelief. "This can't be happening."

But deep down, she knew Kutsiya's machine had worked. Her DNA was being rewritten into that of a South Indian woman. And if her eyes were just the beginning, what else was coming? Sheila clutched the edge of the sink, her stomach churning with fear of the unknown.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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The next morning, Sheila walked into college with her head down, avoiding eye contact at all costs. The confident, self-assured demeanor she was known for had all but vanished. Her reflection in the bathroom mirror later that morning had been another shock. Her eyebrows had darkened and grown thicker overnight, giving her face a subtle yet unmistakable ethnic edge. It was nothing drastic yet, but it was enough to unsettle her. She had hurriedly penciled in a quick plucking appointment for later in the day and left campus early, skipping afternoon classes.

But the changes didn't stop there. Her skin, once pale, now had a warm undertone that hadn't been there the day before. It seemed to darken by the hour, and it terrified her. Sheila hated it. Her once sharp, European features were also softening into something more foreign and her red hair now looked like the result of a cheap dye. The thought of what Kutsiya had done to her made her stomach churn. "That bitch ruined my beauty!"

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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Sheila walked into the local beautician's salon, the jingling bell announcing her arrival. To her dismay, a group of Indian girls glanced up and smiled at her.

"Hi, I'd like to get my eyebrows plucked"

"Of course, darling," one of the girls said with a friendly smile. "But... you know, we could give you a full makeover. You look tired. Long day?"

"Yeah, it's been a long day," she admitted.

"Poor thing. You probably haven't had time to take care of yourself properly. Don't worry, we'll make you look stunning."

Sheila felt too drained to argue. "Fine, let's do it," she said, slumping into the chair. They'd seen plenty of women like her, insecure, trying to stand out with that awful red hair dye. They started by carefully plucking her brows, shaping them into a neat, elegant arch that subtly enhanced her ethnic features. As she dozed off, the girls kept on working expertly.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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"She needs proper foundation too," one girl whispered, as she applied a base that matched Sheila's current warm skin tone. "Probably using skin bleaching cream before."

Then, they moved on to the hair, covering her natural red tones with a more natural-looking jet black. It framed her face beautifully.

When Sheila stirred, blinking groggily, a beautician grinned at her, holding up a mirror. "Nice to see you embracing your heritage!"

"What?" Sheila mumbled, half-asleep. She stared at her reflection, her heart sinking. Her face looked so ethnic now: her dark hair and brown skin tone gave her the appearance of a cute South Asian woman.

"You're probably a quarter or an eighth white anyway," the beautician continued, "so why bother trying to pass as white when you can embrace your heritage?"

"A quarter white? What do you mean?" Sheila stammered, her voice shaky. "I'm not Indian, I'm..."

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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“Bengali?” another girl interjected with a warm smile. “I knew it! Happens to me all the time—people think I’m Indian too. But we always find each other, don’t we?” She laughed.

“Uh... yeah,” she muttered. *They think I’m Bengali? Me?*

The girl handed her a list of recommended products. “Here,” she said, “this bronzer will highlight your cheekbones perfectly. And this foundation is just right for your natural tone, you’ve probably been using one that’s too light.”

Sheila nodded numbly, too exhausted to argue. “Yeah, too light... I’ll take them” she mumbled.

The girls beamed, loading her up with everything from bronzers to eyeliners. “You look 100 percent Bengali now,” one of them said, admiring their work.

Every compliment felt like a punch to Sheila’s gut, but she forced herself to smile and nod. She just wanted to leave. “Yeah, thanks,” she said quietly.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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The bus ride home was unusually quiet, the dim glow of the streetlights flickering through the windows. Sheila stared out at the passing buildings, her reflection faintly visible in the glass. She had to change buses in Southall, a bustling, majority-Asian part of London. As she waited for her transfer, it struck her how easily she blended into the crowd. Instead of standing out as one of the few white girls, as she once would have, she fit in seamlessly. The realization was unsettling.

The reactions from people on the bus were different too. An older Asian woman took the seat beside her and smiled warmly, as if she felt an unspoken connection.

Sheila shifted uncomfortably, returning the smile out of politeness but feeling a strange tension in her chest. The world was treating her as if she belonged, but deep down, a small voice whispered: "Actually, this is not really me. I'm a white girl." Sheila swallowed hard, gripping her bag tighter as the bus rolled through the Southall streets.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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When Sheila finally made it to her place, she shut the door behind her, leaning against it exhaling deeply. What a day. She dropped the bag of beauty products onto the floor and made her way to the bedroom, her feet dragging with exhaustion.

Once inside, she stood in front of the mirror and began to disrobe. Her leather jacket came off first, followed by her jeans, her shirt and finally her undergarments. Her heart sank as she took in the sight before her. Her entire body was now a light, natural brown, her skin glowing under the soft light of the room. Her once-pale complexion was completely gone, replaced by the undeniable hue of South Asian heritage. Her nipples were darker too, a detail that made her stomach churn. Every inch of her screamed a new ethnicity. She was one of the many brown people contributing to making Britain the melting pot it had become. One of those she used to hate.

She clenched her fists, her jaw tightening. "That damn Kutsiya." She could feel the rage bubbling up inside her. The worst part? Her plan worked. Sheila no longer looked like herself. She was unrecognizable, a completely different person.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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And then there was Anaya. Sheila's mind flashed to the girl who used to be the quiet, unassuming Bengali student. The brown nerdy girl she used to bully. Now, Anaya was a radiant blonde, with blue eyes and porcelain skin, the very image of the privileged English girl she had always admired as an insecure young woman. It was enraging, humiliating for the former redhead. Sheila, so proud of her refined British features, had been swapped out like a pawn in Kutsiya's game.

Sheila's chest heaved as she stared at her reflection. Her dark eyes, framed by thick brows, glared back at her. She slammed her fist against the dresser, the sound echoing in the room.

Then anger was replaced with lucid thoughts. "They've won." - she thought. She turned away from the mirror, unable to look at herself any longer. "Kutsiya has taken everything from me. But she won't take my dignity."

Sheila's phone buzzed with a message from Kutsiya: *"Hey niece, visit me at 2 PM tomorrow! Bye, lots of love :)"*

Sheila glared at the screen, her anger simmering. *Niece.* Begrudgingly, she agreed, knowing she had no real choice in the matter. At least, she would not humiliate herself in front of her enemy.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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The following day, Sheila's brown skin had gotten a couple of shades darker. She now teetered on the darker end of the South Asian complexion spectrum, so much so that many conservative Indian families would have frowned at the thought of their sons marrying a girl as dark as her. At 2 PM, Sheila arrived at Kutsiya's office. She found Kutsiya waiting, calm and composed as always. "Are you happy now?" Sheila spat, her voice dripping with venom. She took off her jacket, revealing her new complexion: a deep, rich brown, even darker than Kutsiya's. "You've won. I'm a brown girl. I won't say anything, I get it. But let's be clear, I know you're not turning me back, so I won't humiliate myself by begging you."

Kutsiya's expression didn't waver. She leaned back slightly, her arms crossed, her smile faint but smug. "No, I won't turn you back," she said calmly. "Because you'll be a better person like this." "A better person? You've ruined my life! And why am I getting so dark? Look at my fingers! My skin is even darker than yours!" - she added.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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"Oh, my darling" Kutsiya said warmly. "I may more of a diversity speaker than an actual research professor these days, but let me tell you something interesting about genetic compatibility." She smiled knowingly. "Did you know Anna was more compatible with English genes than Bengali ones? Meanwhile, I was 87 percent more compatible with her Bengali DNA. And you, my dear... you are 99 percent compatible with it."

"What?" Sheila's jaw dropped as Kutsiya gestured toward her. "Look at you. You're even darker than I am. With that compatibility rate, it seems you and I were both destined to be Bengali girls."

"What? What does that even mean? That's not possible! My ancestors were English and Scottish! How could I be destined to look like this?"

Kutsiya chuckled softly, her tone both comforting and firm. "That may be true, but baby girl, why are your melanin levels this high unless your body fully embraced the change? It even exceeded the expected values."

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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Sheila's eyes widened. "Higher levels? So that's why I'm so dark?" Her voice trembled.

Kutsiya leaned forward, pulling her into a gentle embrace. "Shhh, it's okay, Sheila," she murmured. "Accept this. You are beautiful. And more than that you're healthier now than you ever would have been with your old DNA."

Sheila sniffled, her head resting against Kutsiya's shoulder. "Healthier?"

Kutsiya nodded. "Yes, healthier. You may have even dodged a genetic condition you didn't know you were at risk for. Your body knows what it's doing. Oh, and one more thing..." She leaned forward slightly, her voice soft but commanding. "Call me Aunt Kutsiya. We're family now, remember?"

Sheila froze, her body stiffening. "My sister sent you to me from Bangladesh as a little girl to give you a better future here," Kutsiya continued, her eyes gleaming with satisfaction. "Your name is Sheela now. Embrace it."

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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Sheela couldn't ignore how things had changed. On campus, Indian guys who once seemed hesitant around her as a fiery redhead now approached her with ease. They flirted openly, their smiles lingering, their eyes appreciative and confident. They saw her as one of them now. It bothered her, how they no longer seemed intimidated by her, but deep down, a small part of her liked the attention. She hated to admit it, even to herself, but she had always had a secret fantasy about brown men. It clashed with her racist persona and upbringing, and she would have never been caught in a million years with a man who wasn't white but now that barrier had dissolved, leaving her confused.

Later that evening, alone in her apartment, Sheela peeled off her clothes one by one. Her breasts, perky and small, now had dark nipples that stood out. Her eyes traveled lower, to her hips, her thighs, and finally to her labia, also a deep brown. She reached out, hesitating for a moment before running her fingers over her new skin. It felt the same but looked so different, less delicate, less "ladylike".

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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And yet, there was something undeniably sensual about it, something raw and alluring. And she was stuck like that for the rest of her life. "Like this. Forever." - she thought. Anyone meeting her now would not see anything else than a pretty Bengali young woman with dark skin. No explanations would ever be enough to explain what had happened to her. Kutsiya mentioned the possibility of developing a fuller figure. She imagined her body softening and curving into that of a sensual, curvy South Asian woman. Her remaining Anglo body features would fade, replaced entirely by this new identity. With time she would gracefully age into a mature brown beauty, the kind that turned heads even in her later years, as a mother. The image of herself holding a child, dark-eyed, brown-skinned, flashed through her mind. She rolled her eyes - why was that thought turning her on so much?

Closing her eyes, she let her mind wander. She thought of the men who had flirted with her earlier, their voices low and smooth.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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No longer judged by her family or friends, she could finally date the men she had secretly fantasized about. Brown men who now saw her as one of their own.

The thought of being with one of them, their bodies intertwined, skin glistening and sweaty against the white sheets, sent a shiver down her spine. She wasn't the pale, untouchable redhead they once idolized. No, she was one of them now, brown-skinned, sensual, and confident.

Her breathing quickened. There was no going back, but for the first time, she didn't entirely want to. Despite her anger, her humiliation, there was a strange, forbidden thrill in embracing this new identity. A wave of fear washed over her. *Nobody must ever know I am enjoying this deep down*, she thought, her heart racing. *Especially not Kutsiya*. Admitting any satisfaction, even to herself, felt like surrendering completely to the life Kutsiya had imposed on her. And yet, a seed had been planted, and it terrified her.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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Encouraged by Kutsiya, Sheela and Anna had grown surprisingly close. “She needs your expertise to feel confident and blossom into a pretty party girl,” Kutsiya had told her, and though Sheela bristled at the instruction, she found herself unable to refuse. There was something about Kutsiya’s authority, her smug yet commanding presence, that kept Sheela in line. Besides, Kutsiya was now the only person who knew her true identity—a secret Sheela couldn’t risk revealing.

Sheila’s sudden “disappearance” from campus had barely raised an eyebrow. The university had arranged for a new student ID under the name Sheela Khan, while Sheila was officially listed as being on an exchange program in Australia. Anna was happy that threat had vanished.

One evening, Sheela and Anna decided to have a girl’s night out, heading to a popular Indian restaurant near campus. They found a table near the window and settled in, the smell of fragrant spices wafting through the air, the cozy atmosphere buzzing with chatter and laughter.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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The waiter had just placed their dishes on the table. Anna, now in her pale-skinned, blonde-haired form, eagerly took a bite, only to cough as her face turned bright red.

"Oh my God!" she gasped, reaching for her glass of water. "It's good, but really spicy! I usually love this... why did they make it extra spicy?"

Sheela raised an eyebrow, suppressing a smirk. The waiter overheard and stepped in, looking apologetic. "Actually, miss, we made it super mild, like we always do for, uh... English customers."

Anna's cheeks flushed with embarrassment. "Oh," she mumbled, avoiding Sheela's amused gaze. She quickly took a gulp of wine, her face still pink from both the spice and the awkwardness. Sheela, meanwhile, was relishing her dish, savoring each bite of it. She had never been a fan of "spicy ethnic food" before, but now, her new taste buds craved the intense flavors.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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"So, Anna" Sheela said, "as a proper English girl, you must've had loads of Indian food growing up, right?"

Anna froze. "Uh... umm, yeah, it's just that I wasn't really sure about the terminology, haha..." She trailed off, nervously fidgeting with her fork.

Sheela chuckled to herself, watching Anna squirm and take another desperate sip of wine. *Nobody would ever believe this cute, geeky blonde was once Asian*, she thought. Then, glancing down at her own deep brown skin and long black hair, she added *just like nobody would believe I used to be a British redhead. Oh god!*

Anna coughed again as she tried another bite. "Seriously, though, why does it burn so much?" she muttered, gulping more wine.

Sheela just grinned, leaning back and enjoying the moment. "Must be that English palate of yours."

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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Sheela had started eating out often, indulging in foods she once avoided. To her surprise, the extra calories didn't settle the way they used to. Instead of her old physique with a flat chest and stubborn belly fat that forced her to a very strict dietary regime, her body seemed to bloom. She was gaining weight in all the right places, her curves filling out beautifully. She felt conflicted—different, chubby, even ugly by her old standards—when, in reality, she was blossoming into a curvy, gorgeous woman. Her aunt, Kutsiya, encouraged her, reminding her that this was something to embrace, not hide.

One day, Kutsiya was walking alongside Sheela, a faintly amused smile playing on her lips. The two of them looked almost like a cute mother-daughter pair, their matching dark complexions and graceful features drawing attention from passersby.

"Tell me, Sheela," she began, her tone light, "do I look like someone who's about to turn 39?"

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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Sheela hesitated, studying her face. Despite her annoyance, she had to admit Kutsiya looked youthful, her smooth skin free of any lines or creases. "Honestly, you look pretty good," Sheela said reluctantly. "Early 30s, maybe."

"Exactly. That's the beauty of compatibility. You see, back when I was Kimberly, at 38, I looked closer to 48. Age marks, crow's feet, dull skin, you name it. I aged like milk. But now, with the right DNA, everything's changed. This body is aging like wine. No lines, no sagging, just a smooth, healthy glow. As a white woman, I never would've looked this good at this age. Our genes simply weren't built for longevity like this. Now, take Anna, for example. She's more compatible with English genes, and she'll still look stunning at 39." Sheela's jaw tightened, her frustration bubbling beneath the surface. She still ended the Bengali-turned-English beauty. "So what's your point?" she muttered.

"My point, dear niece, is that you should cheer up. You've won the genetic lottery by inheriting a far better genetic package than you ever had before. Tell me, how did your mother age?"

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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Memories of her mother surfaced, her once youthful face had aged rapidly, her skin lined, her metabolism sluggish. By her late 40s, she had looked far older, tired and worn out. “She didn’t age well,” Sheela admitted quietly.

“Exactly. But you? You don’t have to worry about that now. Twenty years from now, you’ll still look stunning. Your new DNA is working wonders already.”

Sheela hesitated before responding, her tone softening. “I guess you’re right, Auntie. Do you think I’ll look as pretty as you?”

Kutsiya laughed gently. “Definitely—if you keep a healthy lifestyle. You’re already well-endowed, and that’s a sign your hormones are working fine! No need to hide those curves.”

Sheela flushed, crossing her arms over her chest. “Aunt, I’m self-conscious about them. I’ve been skinny and fit my whole life.” “That’s because you were working with a different set of cards back then,” Kutsiya replied, unfazed. “Now, you’re playing a better hand. Stop hiding. You’re stunning, and you know it.”

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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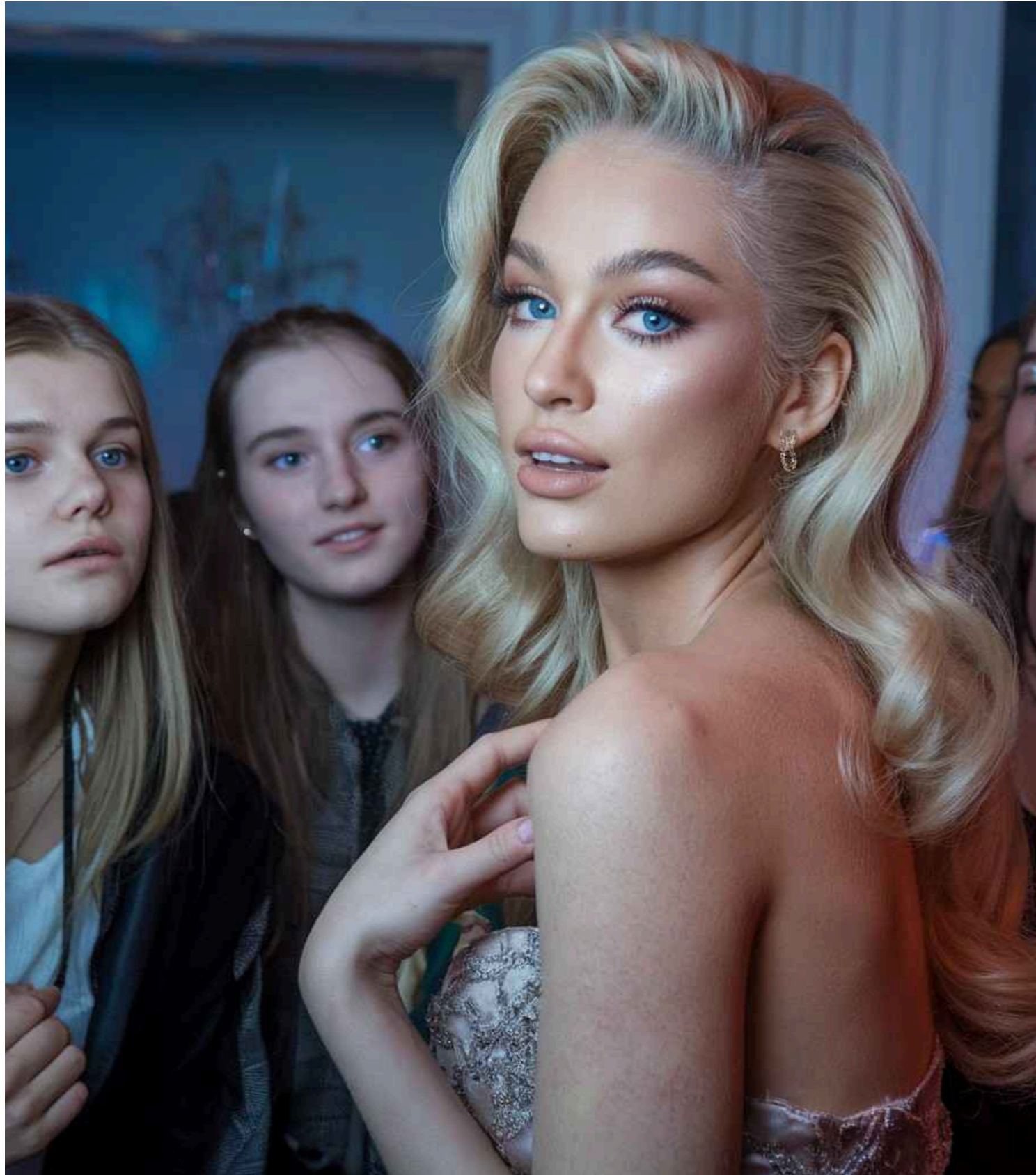
Later, she stood in front of her mirror,. Every line was smooth, every contour beautiful. Her once pale complexion had been traded for something richer, more exotic. *I fucking love how I look now. Maybe it wasn't such a bad trade after all.* Pale white skin for years of youth and beauty. And curves. Curvy bodies were the new beauty standard, right? *I am brown, curvy, and pretty. Luckily, there is a place for women like me. And plenty of men into me.* The idea sent a spark of unexpected confidence through her. Then the absurdity of her own thoughts hit her. *Oh god, she groaned inwardly, I'm starting to sound like a progressive feminist campaigning for inclusivity.* She rolled her eyes at herself. She turned slightly, admiring her reflection from different angles, a quiet sense of acceptance beginning to take hold.

*This is me now,* she thought, her lips curving into a faint smile. *And you know what... that's okay!*

There was a big student party on that night, it could be a good occasion to shine and learn how to be more confident in her body, not only while on her own but also in public. The *belle* of the ball, however, would be Anna, as always.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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The student party was in full swing, music pulsing, drinks flowing, and laughter filling the air. Anna was the undisputed queen of the evening, her blonde hair perfectly styled, her makeup flawless, thanks to Sheela's expertise. The two had spent hours earlier, Anna nervously trusting Sheela to bring out her best features. And Sheela had delivered. Anna looked radiant, her confidence shining brighter than ever. Sheela leaned against the wall, watching as Anna moved effortlessly through the crowd. People flocked to her, showering her with compliments, and even her former bullies couldn't hide their envy. They whispered amongst themselves, casting jealous glances Anna's way.

"Who is she?" one of them muttered. "She's stunning."

"She's the new girl." another said, their tone tinged with bitterness. "Why does she get all the attention?"

Sheela's jaw tightened as she overheard them. They had no idea that the blonde bombshell they envied was the same shy, geeky girl they used to tease relentlessly.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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The irony made her blood boil. She muttered under her breath, "Dumb white girls..."

Her voice barely carried over the music, but the moment the words left her mouth, she froze. Sheela brought her darkened hands to her face, the realization hitting her like a jolt. *What did I just say?* She had spoken the words so naturally, without thought or hesitation, as if they were ingrained.

Sheela's heart raced as she stared at her hands, their rich brown hue stark against her pale memory of what they once were. In that instant, she realized she had mentally accepted her transformation. She no longer saw herself as the pale redhead she once was. Without even realizing it, she had started to think and feel as a real Bengali girl. She let out a shaky breath, lowering her hands and glancing around to see if anyone had noticed her slip. But the party continued, oblivious to her internal struggle. *This is who I am now*, she thought, her eyes drifting back to Anna, who laughed and twirled under the party lights, basking in her new life. *And there's no going back.*

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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After a while, Sheela started working as a babysitter through an app. It was decent work—kids adored her, and it gave her some much-needed cash. But there was another side to the job that made her uneasy. Men, especially white men in their 50s and 60s, would often stare at her with unsettling intensity when she dropped off or picked up kids. Their lingering looks sent a shiver down her spine. *Creepy old white men*, she thought more than once, trying to shake off the discomfort.

One day, as she accepted a new booking, Sheela didn't realize she'd matched with her former British family. The moment she rang the doorbell and the familiar face of her old mother answered, her heart dropped. Sheela froze, but there was no flicker of recognition in the woman's eyes. To her, Sheela was just another south Asian babysitter.

The encounter began awkwardly enough, but as the woman—who Sheela now thought of as "the old hag"—chatted with her, it quickly spiraled into something worse.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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"So, where are you from, dear?" she asked, her tone polite but her eyes sharp. "I'm a British citizen," Sheela replied coolly, keeping her voice steady.

The old woman's lips pursed, clearly dissatisfied. "Yes, but where were you born?" Sheela hesitated, feeling the weight of the moment. "I moved here when I was three," she said, dodging the question as best as she could.

The old woman pressed further, her tone turning more pointed. "But where were you *born*, dear?" Sheela's jaw tightened. She could feel her frustration bubbling, but she forced herself to remain composed. "Bangladesh," she admitted reluctantly, keeping her answer short.

The old woman's face lit up, as if she'd just won a debate. "Exactly, my dear. So that means you're Bengali, doesn't it?" Sheela clenched her fists at her sides, biting back the retort on the tip of her tongue. "Okay, sure," she said flatly, trying to end the conversation. "I guess you could say I'm Bengali."

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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Sheela finally saw her family for what they were. Their pride in being “properly British” wasn’t just about tradition, it was rooted in a quiet sort of racism. Growing up, she’d let that shape her, made herself fit into their narrow mold. But now, she wasn’t part of that world anymore. Thinking back, she wondered if they’d ever really cared about her as a person or just as a reflection of their ideals.

For the first time, she stopped worrying about the transformation that had changed everything. She let go of the shame and prejudice she’d been taught and stopped feeling guilty for the preferences she’d developed. She was a pretty Bengali girl now, and one day, she’d marry someone South Asian like her.

That weekend, she decided to do something she never would have as the posh redhead she used to be. She went to a party mostly for Indian and South Asian students. The room was alive with music and laughter. Sheela stood out in her own way, wearing a fitted top and a miniskirt. Her dark skin glowed under the soft party lights.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES



As Sheela walked into the crowd, a mix of nervousness and anticipation bubbled inside her. She fit in here, among South Asian students, her dark skin and black hair blending seamlessly. But as she moved through the room, the unspoken social rules quickly reminded her of where she stood. Among the range of skin tones, hers was on the darker side, and it was a fact she couldn't escape. The reminder came sharply when a light-skinned guy she tried to talk to shut her down with a blunt, cutting remark: "I don't date dark-skinned girls."

Sheela's chest tightened, but she kept her composure. She knew this wasn't about her personally—it was a reflection of a deeply ingrained societal issue. Still, it hurt. *Even here, she thought bitterly, there's no escape from this.* She went home, bitter.

Colorism, she realized, was alive and well, even here. She overheard snippets of conversations that stung more than she cared to admit.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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A few days later, at another party, Sheela found herself scanning the room with less trepidation than before. The sting of her last experience still lingered, but she pushed it aside, determined not to let it ruin her evening. She caught the eye of another man. He was not that tall, but had a kind smile and an easy confidence that immediately put her at ease. He approached her, his eyes lighting up as he spoke.

"Hi," he said, his voice warm and genuine. "I don't think we've met. I'm Rohan." Sheela smiled back, feeling a spark of hope she hadn't expected. "Hi, I'm Sheela."

As they talked, her nerves began to settle. The party was in full swing, the music pounding through the walls, but Sheela and Rohan had slipped away into a quiet, dimly lit room. Their chemistry had been undeniable from the moment they'd met, and under the cloak of darkness, they shared an intimate connection that left Sheela feeling exhilarated and vulnerable all at once. For the first time, she allowed herself to enjoy the thrill of being desired without the baggage of who she once was.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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As weeks passed and their relationship deepened, Sheela started to feel hope. Rohan was kind, charming, and made her feel loved. But one evening, as they sat together after dinner, he admitted something that struck her like a dagger. "My parents," he began hesitantly, avoiding her gaze, "they... well, they wouldn't approve of me dating someone dark-skinned."

Sheela froze, her stomach twisting in humiliation and anger. *Dark-skinned*. It was a descriptor that now defined her, one she hadn't chosen, but one that seemed to carry so much weight in every interaction. Back when she had been a white girl, she would have been seen as a goddess by his family—practically worshipped for her pale skin and Western features. But back then, she'd been too prejudiced, too entrenched in her own upbringing, to even consider dating a brown man like Rohan. And now? She was one of them, and it wasn't enough. Her jaw tightened, her hands curling into fists at her sides. "So, what are you saying?" she asked, her voice cold. "Are you dating me or your mum?" Rohan looked startled. "Man up and tell them, Rohan. If you care about me, you'll fight for this."

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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Sheela sat across from her aunt Kutsiya at an Indian restaurant, her frustration bubbling over as she recounted the humiliating conversation she'd had with Rohan. Kutsiya listened, her expression soft and maternal. "Oh, sweetie, I'm sorry to hear that. You're absolutely right. And honestly, it's ridiculous that someone would reject a beauty like you just because you're on the darker side. But," Kutsiya continued, "it's also a good lesson. You used to be a bit of a racist, remember?"

Sheela groaned. "Look at me, Auntie. I have changed. I've learned my lesson. I just want to be a normal Bengali girl, dating other South Asians. I'm not like you, marrying a white guy!" She had gone too far. Kutsiya raised an eyebrow in amusement. "Where did that come from? Are you... envious?" she asked, her voice teasing. "I'm sorry," Sheela mumbled. "It's just... some internalized racism, I guess. Shit. I'm still a bad person, aren't I?" "You're not a bad person, sweetie. You're just going through a lot right now," she said, her voice filled with understanding. "And I'm proud of the woman you are growing into." Sheela hugged her, feeling oddly emotional. She had developed an actual emotional connection to Kutsiya.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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Not only had Sheela gained a hotter and healthier body, not only it made her free to date the men she was truly attracted to, she had also gained a loving family member like she had never had before. In fact, her whole concept of family was about to change completely.

In the end, Kutsiya took matters in her hands and managed to persuade Rohan's family to accept Sheela as his bride. As the only member of Sheela's "family," Kutsiya's role had been crucial. When Rohan's upper-class Hindu family expressed further concerns about cultural differences, assuming Sheela and her aunt were Muslim, Kutsiya stepped in calmly. "Not all Bengalis are Muslim," she explained. "Sheela and I aren't religious. Many of us, especially millennials and younger, are agnostic or even atheist." It hadn't been easy, but she'd done it, and now they were preparing for the wedding.

For the wedding, Kutsiya embraced traditional Bengali fashion for the first time, draping herself in a stunning saree that highlighted her elegance. It felt completely alien to her, having spent all of her life wearing boring grey outfits, and at the beginning it felt like wearing a costume. After a while though, she found herself loving the style, wondering why she hadn't tried it sooner.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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Sheela didn't shy away from the customary practices or the elaborate outfits either. In fact, she was eager to see herself dressed in something more traditional.

As she adjusted her dress in the mirror, she couldn't help but chuckle at the irony. As a British redhead, she would never have been caught dead in such an outfit. Now, she looked and felt good in the flowing fabric, the jewelry, and even the intricate henna designs on her hands.

The wedding itself was beautiful. Sheela smiled through it all, even when Rohan's family handed her what they clearly thought were thoughtful gifts—several vases of skin-whitening cream. She cringed internally, rolling her eyes as she accepted them with polite thanks. *At least they've accepted me*, she thought wryly. *Baby steps, I guess*. She realized that her husband's family would soon be a big part of her life now and if she managed to earn their affection, they would love her like a daughter. Much more than the cold, distant affection she experienced growing up in a British dysfunctional family.

## CRISP(ER) CONSEQUENCES

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By the end of the ceremony, Sheela was exhausted but happy and her aunt felt proud to see Sheela stepping fully into her new life.

After the guests left, Sheela changed into a new outfit. For the first night of their honeymoon, Sheela had chosen something special to wear: a breathtaking red ensemble that perfectly balanced tradition and allure. The richly embroidered top hugged her curves, the intricate gold patterns shimmering in the soft light. Her long, wavy black hair fell gracefully over her shoulders, framing her glowing complexion. She had applied bold, striking makeup, her dark eyes lined to perfection, and a small white bindi on her forehead to symbolize her adoption of the grooms culture. He insisted about that.

She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. Confidence radiated from her reflection. She could barely believe she used to be an arrogant, unhappy white British girl until recently. What a gift this whole adventure had been!

She entered the master bedroom, swaying her hips, and asked the groom: "Are you ready to make me yours?"