

The Mistress of the West

by

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“You understand why I'm doing this, daughter, you do? You understand why you are here?”

“Yes, father,” Shián said, suppressing a sigh. Her father was using the language of the Western Kingdom. He had learned the common tongue decades ago, he'd had to for his role as tribe elder, but he refused to use it. Shián preferred the common language used throughout the Five Kingdoms, it sounded better to the ears, felt better on the tongue.

“I'm here,” Shián continued, “to learn all the pleasures of the flesh and the mind so I can prostitute myself to the first prince I see in the hope of one day becoming one of the next King's many queens.”

Her father was knelt on one knee looking up into his daughter's face. Harlow Stormborne was a tall man, wiry and firm. Many thought him cold, harsh, uncaring but not Shián, he had always been kind to his only daughter.

“Only thirteen and already so smart. Not wrong, you aren't.” Harlow said smiling at his daughter. “But that mouth. Used for other things than talking. You learn that here, I Think.” The smile disappeared, replaced by a concerned frown.

Shián said nothing; she just stared at her father through big, dark eyes hoping he would change his mind and not give her over to the school. A stray gust of wind blew her shawl down around her shoulders exposing her face and hair to the baking sun and dry, dusty sand of the desert. She should have pulled the shawl back into position but instead she just stood staring at her father, he in turn stared back.

“I am sorry, daughter,” Harlow said reaching up and pulling Shián's shawl back into place. “Here you will learn good skills, useful. Here you bring honour to tribe. Here you learn to be mother to princes.”

He turned Shián round and stood, placing a hand on her back and guiding his daughter towards the door to the school, away from their horses, away from the desert, away from any hope of him changing his mind.

Harlow knocked on the wooden door with his left hand, keeping his right on Shián's back. She wasn't sure if it was for comfort or to stop her from running away but she was glad of it all the same.

Shián heard a rustle beside her and for the first time noticed two guards stood a few feet away either side of the door. They were large men with soft eyes, almost certainly eunuchs. Both wore hooded cloaks the colour of sand and blended in to their surroundings so well they were near invisible.

“Don't look,” Shián's father warned her. “Polite, it isn't.”

The door opened and a tall woman stood on the other side. Her hair was tied in a tight bun and she wore a long black robe that hid most of her body save her face. Behind her the building was dark, lit only by flickering candles. It seemed to Shián like the mouth of some great monster from one of her grandmother's tales.

“Name?” the woman said, her voice soft and warm.

“Shián Crowfeather,” Harlow responded for his daughter. He was a tribe elder and yet the big man seemed nervous around this woman.

The woman took a step to the side. "Come in child."

Shián hesitated, she'd never been inside a building before; they were a lot more imposing than tents. Shián felt her father give her a gentle push on the back and Shián found herself inside. She span just as the door closed. Her father and the desert that had been home all her life were gone.

The woman produced a key from a pocket hidden in her robe somewhere and locked the door before glancing at Shián.

"Come with me, child." With that the woman strode away leaving Shián hurrying to catch up behind her.

"The rules here are simple, child, obey them and your time here will be comfortable, disobey them and there will be punishment," the woman spoke to Shián as she walked through a corridor built of stone the colour and texture of sand.

Shián found herself focused more on her surroundings than the woman's words. The stone was shaped and chiselled to form intricate designs around each doorway that led off from the corridor. To be surrounded by so much stone was beyond daunting but there was something else that bothered Shián even more. She couldn't hear the wind. In the desert the wind was a constant companion and adversary. Shián couldn't remember a time when it had been any more than a thin tent flap away.

"Stop gawking, child," the woman chided noticing Shián's distraction.

"I'm sorry, it's just that I've never..."

"I didn't ask why you were standing there with your mouth open like a fish. It's not suitable for a mistress and if you are seen doing it again you will be punished."

"Yes, mistress," Shián didn't hesitate to respond. The mistress started walking again leaving Shián wondering what a fish was and if she had looked like one.

"There are two rules here. First; obey the mistresses at all times. Do not hesitate or question, just obey. Second; while you are here there will be no associating with any of the men. There are few that stay here and they know the rules as well, they will ignore you, you will ignore them. Are you clear on the rules?"

"Yes, mistress," Shián answered.

"Good." The mistress stopped in front of a heavy wooden door. Shián noticed it had a number thirteen etched into the wood. "This will be your room for the first year. You will graduate to a single room according to your progress."

The mistress produced a set of iron keys from her robe and inserted one of them into the lock. A heavy click later and she pushed open the door. Inside Shián saw there were two bunk beds. Two sets of eyes glanced towards the door and then looked away as both girls already in the room tried to avoid catching the mistress's attention.

"Wait inside until you are called upon for your first inspection. There is a robe for you inside the wardrobe, wear it. Your current clothing will be disposed of."

Shián stepped inside the room, eager to show her obedience and a moment later the heavy wooden door closed behind her. Another moment later Shián heard the lock click into place.

The room could only have been described as cramped. There was only just enough room for the two bunk beds and the wardrobe. If more than one of the girls was up at a time they would have to squeeze past each other. There was no mirror, no wash basin, and no bed pans. Shián had lived in tents her entire life but even they had looked luxurious when compared to her new room.

"I suggest you put your robe on before they call for you," said one of the girls. She looked older than Shián and was wearing makeup. Shián had rarely seen make up worn by anyone and never on one so young. The girl dangled her legs off the top bunk of one of the beds as she eyed Shián with unabashed curiosity. "The mistresses don't like tardiness. Oh and if you've got anything personal you want to keep hide it now and hide it good."

"Thank you. My name is Shián Crowfeather," Shián introduced herself to both girls.

The older girl continued to watch Shián but the second girl in the room jumped up to stand

before Shián. She was shorter than Shián with a round face and bright blue eyes.

"Hayley Coldsnap," The girl said smiling. "I'm new here as well. Arrived just yesterday but Lexis has been here a year already. She knows all the tricks."

Shián looked up at the older girl who smiled at her but only for a moment.

"Lexis Broadfield."

"You're not a westerner," Shián said, it wasn't a question.

Lexis shook her head. "Southerner. My daddy is a merchant, helps supply this place. He decided to send me here to straighten me out."

"Is it working?" Shián asked with a smile. Lexis didn't smile back.

"Do what the mistresses tell you," the older girl said, her voice solemn. "The punishments are... cruel."

Silence held for a moment before Hayley spoke. "It's just the three of us here at the moment so take whichever bottom bunk you want. Or I could move if you'd prefer a top bunk."

"Bottom will be fine," Shián said sitting down on the bed underneath Hayley. She had never slept on a bed before, it felt too soft. Shián doubted she would ever be able to sleep on such a thing.

"You should get changed now," Lexis said. "No telling when they'll come for you."

"My name is mistress Burnhide. I will be your primary tutor while you are here. That means I am here to teach and train you. Do you understand?"

"Yes, mistress," Shián answered.

Mistress Burnhide did not smile; she stared at Shián through slitted eyes. She had no doubt once been very beautiful, as all mistresses were, but age had started to catch up with her. Crow's feet were present at the corner of her eyes, her face showed wrinkles despite make up and there were a few streaks of grey in her sleek black hair. There seemed to be nothing soft or caring about the mistress.

"Disrobe," the mistress ordered.

"Um..." Shián started to object.

"Do not hesitate when given an order, child," Mistress Burnhide said, her voice flat and cold. "That will be your final warning, next time you will be punished. Now, disrobe."

Shián pulled the robe over her head and let it fall to the floor. She stood, naked, in front of mistress Burnhide and her harsh gaze. Shián dropped her eyes to the floor, her hands moving to cover herself.

"Do not cover yourself up, child. If you are ashamed of your body no man will ever want to possess it."

The mistress started to walk around Shián inspecting her body with her eyes whilst Shián felt more cold and alone than she ever thought possible. Once satisfied the mistress stopped in front of Shián and took a step forward, she reached out and pinched one of Shián's nipples hard. Shián gasped in pain and a moment later felt an open hand slap her across the face.

"When a man is enjoying your body he does not want to feel he is doing anything wrong. Even if his actions cause you pain you will act as if it is pleasurable. Do you understand?"

Shián could feel tears welling in her eyes but forced them down and nodded.

"Yes, mistress." Even to her own ears her voice sounded choked but the mistress made no mention of it. Instead she pinched Shián's other nipple and then rested one hand under each breast. Then she ran a hand down each side of Shián's body before raising each of Shián's arms in turn, plucking a single hair from each armpit and then moving on to give the hair between Shián's legs a similar inspection. Shián bit her tongue to keep from crying out at the pain.

"You're pretty, one day you'll even be beautiful," mistress Burnhide said somehow managing to make it not a compliment, "but you will need more than that. We will teach you not only how to look beautiful but how to act beautiful. Now pick up your robe. I'll take you back to your room."

With that the mistress started off back the way they had come at a brisk pace leaving Shián to

throw the robe over her head and hurry to catch up.

“Do you know how to shave? Under your arms and between your legs? Most men prefer their women shaven; therefore you will always be so from now on.”

“Um, no mistress, I don't,” Shián replied. A single tear rolled down her cheek, she rubbed it away before the mistress could see.

“I will have Lexis teach you.” They arrived at Shián's room and mistress Burnhide unlocked and opened the door then ushered Shián inside.

“Lexis, teach the girl to shave. I want her clean by tomorrow morning.”

“Yes, mistress,” Lexis responded jumping off her bunk and lowering her eyes to the floor.

“A mistress should never jump child. You should dismount.” With that the mistress closed and locked the door leaving Shián inside with her new roommates.

Shián leaned against the door shaking. She waited for what seemed like an age to hear the footsteps of mistress Burnhide fade away into the distance and then she could no longer hold back the tears. Hot, salty water streaked down her face and she shook with the sobs.

“Are you all right?” Hayley asked, a frightened look on her face.

Lexis crossed the distance between her and Shián and embraced the younger girl, just holding her. Shián didn't know how long she spent crying into Lexis' robe, only that she cried until there were no more tears left.

“What's wrong with that bitch?” Shián asked, glancing at her target over her meal. Both the students and the mistresses ate at specified times in the great hall. Each student was given food prepared just for them. Shián picked at her fresh vegetables and small slices of ham. The mistresses had decided the diet would keep her slim whilst also filling out her figure. In truth Shián was glad of the portions despite their small size, she knew girls who got far less.

“Who? Burnhide?” Patty Deeproot asked from Shián's left.

“Who else?” Shián said rubbing her right arm. She had been practising applying makeup all morning under her mistresses 'supervision'. Mistress Burnhide couldn't slap Shián whilst she was applying makeup so instead she pinched her hard on the arm whenever Shián made a mistake. It had been a very painful morning.

“You shouldn't call her that,” Lexis advised, her voice just above a whisper. “They have ears amongst the students.”

It wasn't the first time Lexis had given the advice but then it wouldn't be the first time Shián had been punished for insulting her mistress either.

“I heard her nickname the other day,” Patty's whisper was loud enough for the entire table to hear. “During my massage training. The mistresses didn't think I was paying attention or maybe they thought I couldn't hear them, Jaine's moaning was very loud.”

“I was not,” Jaine protested from the other side of the table though the deep red colour her face had gone denied her protested innocence.

“Yes you were. Only Hayley moans louder than you,” Patty pressed. Hayley was in fact known for her volume, the other students had nicknamed her 'fog horn'.

“Some men like volume,” Hayley quoted from her mistress. “It tells them they're doing it right.”

All of the girls around the table broke into laughter but it soon stopped at the inquisitive glances from the mistresses table. There weren't many students at the school but there was enough to fill two tables. The older girls tended to keep to their own table and the mistresses never mingled with the students, something the students of all ages were more than pleased about.

“So what is it?” Shián asked Patty with a nudge.

“What is what?” Patty responded, her face a blank slate.

“Burnhide's nickname with the other mistresses,” Shián prompted suppressing an unmistresslike sigh.

"Oh that." Patty lowered her voice to a loud whisper again. "They call her the mistress of the desert."

Shián just paused looking at her friend. She had expected something funny or rude or embarrassing but now she just felt disappointed.

"Is that it?" Shián asked.

"Yes," Patty said.

"Well it's a bit... dull," Shián said. She knew Patty thought it was scandalous gossip and didn't want to spoil her delight at sharing it.

"The interesting bit is why they call her that," Lexis said. All eyes at the table turned towards the older girl.

"You already knew?" Patty asked, her disappointment plain. Lexis nodded once in response.

"So?" Shián asked, eager to know more. "Why is it? Tell us."

"Fine, but you all owe me one," Lexis said. Everyone knew the older girl liked to collect favours.

"Burnhide is barren, always has been." Lexis' words were followed by a collective gasp from the other girls, and then they all spoke at once.

"Are you sure?"

"How do you know?"

"How awful."

Only Shián was quiet. Her gaze had moved from Lexis and now she stared at mistress Burnhide, not even bothering to hide the hostility in her eyes. She knew if the mistress caught her gaze she'd be punished but right now Shián didn't care. She had embarrassing information about her mistress and it felt like a little victory.

"Why do you think she's here?" Lexis continued. "Burnhide is well known for her beauty in her youth but she never caught herself a powerful husband, so instead she came back to teach at the school and married a local.

"All because she can't have children?" Patty asked.

"Exactly."

"Burnhide is married?" Shián asked, bringing her attention back to the conversation.

Lexis looked at her in surprise and nodded. "You didn't know?"

Shián shook her head in response. How could she not have known mistress Burnhide was married?

"He lives in the nearby village. You've probably seen him; he works as a builder or something here sometimes. Tall, big strong arms, full beard, quite handsome."

"Mmmmmmm..." from Hayley.

"Yes, we all know you've seen him, Hayley," Lexis said causing the younger girl to blush.

"Hayley's probably thinking of him even when one of us is working on her," Patty said with a grin earning a scowl from Hayley. "I wonder if he likes volume."

"What's his name?" Shián asked Lexis, ignoring the exchange.

"Um, Urgo I think. Urgo Dust," Lexis said. "But don't go mentioning this to Burnhide of any of the others. They'll put me in the hole for a month.

Shián had been in the hole, it wasn't pleasant. She smiled at her friend. "Your secret is safe with me."

By the age of sixteen Shián had been at the school of mistresses for almost three years. She'd already learnt more about giving, receiving and faking pleasure both to and from men and women, than she ever thought possible.

The school had taught her how to capture a man's attention with but a glance, how to keep that attention with the way she moved, the garments she wore, the scents she chose. They'd taught her all kinds of conversational tricks, such as how to flatter a man's ego whilst not letting on that she

may well be smarter than him and also how to be polite while embarrassing other women in conversation to remove the competition.

The school was teaching Shián everything she needed to know to seduce a powerful husband, how to walk, how to talk, how to dance and how to fuck but after three years she'd still not once had sex with a man. In truth she'd hadn't even seen a male in three years, apart from those that were brought in to show to the girls so that they knew what to expect of course. It would, after all, be unseemly for one of the girls to be scared at the sight of a man's manhood.

Shián was something of a star pupil. She was starting to grow into her body and all the mistresses already agreed she was beautiful and would only become more so as she aged. Shián was slim without being skinny, she curved in all the right places, her breasts were perky and well-shaped, her skin was soft and the perfect olive tone of a westerner and her eyes were as dark as her black hair.

Shián excelled in all her studies, learning all the mistresses had to teach and making the practice of her studies seem easy and natural. The other girls rejoiced to be picked as Shián's partner and all the mistresses praised her efforts. All except the mistress of the desert.

Mistress Burnhide never complimented Shián, never praised her and still found every excuse possible to punish her student. The punishments were always cruel, always inventive and Shián was certain the mistress enjoyed punishing her student, she just couldn't understand why. Shián had long ago decided it was out of jealousy. She was more beautiful and more skilled than Burnhide had ever been and she had her whole life ahead of her. And she wasn't barren.

"Pain and pleasure are not opposites. They are, in fact, very similar," mistress Burnhide lectured to the group of students.

The mistress paced in front of the girls as she spoke. They were all knelt on the customary padded rugs in their standard brown student robes. Ten sets of eyes followed the mistress as she paced and lectured. She didn't look at the girls as she spoke. Mistress Burnhide preferred to act almost as if her students weren't there at all, at least until she had to interact with them.

"... Many men either confuse pleasure and pain or link the two together. Some will even take pleasure in the causing or receiving of pain. You will learn to facilitate these desires and, as with the others, make them your own."

As always Burnhide had her hair pulled back into a tight ponytail, it was thick and dark and Shián could imagine that, if the mistress ever let her hair down, it would look much like Shián's own hair, only with the occasional streak of grey. Burnhide's makeup was pristine but even so Shián could spot the unmistakable signs of ageing. After all, there was only so much make up could hide and Burnhide was well past her prime.

Mistress Burnhide turned to look at Shián so suddenly that, for a moment, Shián thought the mistress had read her thoughts. She fought the urge to panic, dreading what would come next.

"Crowfeather," mistress Burnhide said pointing to the floor in front of her. It was her way of calling Shián to the front of the room, in truth Shián found it demeaning but she was sure that was the point.

Shián obeyed as always. Standing and walking to the front, making sure not to make eye contact with the mistress. Burnhide would take that as a sign of defiance and that would bring punishment.

Burnhide glanced at Shián who was starting to approach the same height as her mistress. It would be a small victory the day when Shián was taller than Burnhide but Shián would take any victory she could.

"Disrobe," the mistress said in her customary emotionless voice.

Shián didn't hesitate; she had long ago discarded any awkwardness to do with her body. To hesitate or to show embarrassment would only bring punishment and she was certain she was already about to receive some of that now.

Mistress Burnhide took a step forward and reached down, rubbing between Shián's legs. Shián

stood as motionless as stone, trying desperately not to give the mistress the satisfaction of seeing the physical pleasure the mistresses actions gave her. She bit the inside of her lip almost hard enough to draw blood but could already tell her traitorous body was giving her away by getting wet.

The mistress kept going, watching Shián the entire time until her student could no longer control her body. The moment the first tremor ran through Shián the mistress's free hand shot out, pinching and twisting Shián's nipple hard. Shián couldn't help herself, she gasped. Her legs almost buckled but she managed to remain upright.

The mistress took a step back and wiped her hand dry whilst she waited for Shián to compose herself.

"Was that pleasurable or painful?" The mistress asked gesturing towards Shián's nipple, now an angry red colour.

Shián thought about the experience. She could feel her nipple hurting now; it felt sore but at the time...

"I... don't know mistress." Shián braced for the slap. Mistress Burnhide seemed to enjoy slapping her when she answered incorrectly. At first Shián had cringed away, now she knew better. She waited but the slap didn't come.

Mistress Burnhide turned towards the gathered students. "The signals of pleasure and pain in one's body can be confused. With training you will learn to confuse the signals yourself when needed. Sit back down Crowfeather." Burnhide added without looking at her student.

Shián picked up her robe and walked back to her seat on shaky legs. Her legs always felt weak after a climax. More than one of her fellow students gave her a sympathetic smile.

Afterwards Shián sat in her room alone. She had only recently been moved to a private room and both enjoyed the privacy and missed the company of sharing a living space. She till spent most of her free time, little as it was, with Lexis and Hayley, as the three had become close friends, but she also appreciated the time apart.

Shián didn't cry. She felt violated and abused but they were familiar feelings, she often felt this way after lessons where the mistresses 'taught', but she didn't cry, she never cried, not since that first night at the school three years ago. Shián refused to give Burnhide that power over her ever again. No matter what 'lessons' or punishment the ageing mistress inflicted she would never again make Shián cry.

Shián's room was about the same size as the one she had shared with Lexis and Hayley. It had just the one bed and a wardrobe for clothing, after graduating to a private room she was also given some other clothing though the mistresses still determined when she could wear anything not a brown robe. There was also a small desk with a chair and a large oval mirror mounted on the wall above it. Shián now had her own brushes, tweezers, razors and make up and she also had orders to use them every day. To attend a lesson looking anything less than perfect would mean punishment after all.

She sat in front of her desk staring into her mirror and brushing her hair. It was something her grandmother had done for her back before Shián had come to the school of mistresses. Shián assumed it was something her mother would have done but the woman had died in childbirth, as such, her grandmother on her father's side, had acted as a mother to Shián for as long as she could remember. The school had taught Shián how to properly care for her hair though. They had taught the best way to brush, the correct brushes to use, the proper lotions to use. Shián's hair was now a full, dark glossy black that extended a fair way down her back. Many of the other students were more than a little jealous of it. Shián knew she was pretty but so were all the students at the school, her hair was special, it was the most beautiful thing about her and it made her stand out even among the other girls.

Even her hair couldn't distract her today. Shián felt angry. She had never hated anyone before in her life, not until mistress Burnhide. Why was the woman so intent on punishing her, humiliating

her?

It's unfair. Shián mouthed as she stared into the mirror. She felt like raging, like throwing something but she wouldn't. She had been trained better than that. Random acts of frustration, boredom and anger were unmistresslike.

Shián replaced the hair brush in its proper place in the desk draw; it was a beautiful brush with a bone handle and hundreds of metal bristles. It was her favourite possession at the school. She stood; suppressing the sigh she felt like releasing and walked to the door. Opening the door she stepped out of her room and began walking.

Shián didn't walk quickly, there was no need, she didn't know where she was going, and she didn't have anywhere to go. Though it was unusual to see a student walking around the school grounds without a specific destination, it wasn't unheard of and Shián had long since earned the privilege of being able to do so without supervision. The few women she did pass, students and mistresses alike paid her little attention. They would just assume she was on her way to the baths or to practice with another student.

Before long Shián found herself in the garden, she wasn't sure why. Some of the students she knew loved the garden, the pretty colours, the natural perfume of the flowers, warm light and soft benches all made for a serene atmosphere. Shián, on the other hand, thought it was a waste of effort. She had lived her first thirteen years in the desert, the only flowers she had ever seen before arriving at the school were cactus flowers and at least cactuses had a use, they could be harvested for water. Shián missed the desert, she knew it was no more than the walls of the school building away but to her that was an impossibly long way away.

There were no students in the garden this afternoon; it was empty save for a single man. The man stood over a workbench measuring planks of wood. Just yesterday a sand storm had blown out one of the delicate glass windows and it had been determined that the entire frame needed replacing.

Shián adapted a knowing half smile and sauntered over to the man. She had been trained to talk to men but it had been three years since her last verbal encounter with the opposite sex and that had been her father. Shián was intrigued; she wanted to put what the school had taught her to the test.

"Hello," Shián said as she approached.

The man jumped as she spoke. He looked at Shián with a look akin to a terrified mouse then he glanced around the garden, nervous movements like those of a bird.

"I can't speak to you," he said in a hushed voice.

Shián giggled as if he'd made a joke.

"That's fine. We don't have to talk."

Shián studied the man as she walked around him. She made sure she was close enough to touch but also made sure she didn't so much as brush against him. The man was tall with thick, strong arms that showed through his sleeveless vest. He had a full brown beard with flecks of grey starting to show. He still had a full head of hair and it reached down to his shoulders, not the typical western fashion.

Shián continued to circle the man, inspecting him as she walked much as the mistresses inspected their students. He was well muscled and not at all unappealing. He looked up to catch her eyes; Shián smiled and looked away forcing colour to her cheeks.

"What is it you want?" the man asked.

"My name is Shián, what's yours?"

"Urgo," he said glancing around again, a light sheen had appeared on his forehead.

"Urgo," Shián repeated as if to herself. She ran her tongue over her lips, sure that Urgo was watching. "A strong name. I like it."

It all made sense. Men weren't allowed in the school without a eunuch escort unless...

"You're mistress Burnhide's husband," Shián said, it wasn't a question.

“Yes, how did you...”

“It must be hard,” Shián mused out loud as she walked past Uργο again, this time making sure she brushed past him. He towered over her in size yet Shián felt like she was in complete control. It was a strange feeling, intoxicating almost.

“Hard?” Uργο asked.

“Yes,” Shián said and looked up into his eyes. They were dull, brown and wide. Shián was reminded of a horse when she looked into his eyes, plenty of strength but little intelligence.

“Because she's barren,” Shián continued, “don't you have the urge to plant your seed in more fertile ground?”

Uργο looked away.

“To marry a mistress is a great honour,” he said. “She is beautiful and...”

“Oh I'm sure she was... once,” Shián cut him off. “A long time ago. They say I look somewhat like her, only younger. Prettier. Fertile.”

Shián looked up into his eyes again and saw it. There was a hunger there, a hunger that would grow if unfed.

“Goodbye, Uργο,” Shián said and turned walking away. After a few steps she stopped and turned back to him. “See you tomorrow.”

With that Shián left and sauntered back towards her room. She suppressed the victorious grin that threatened to explode forth; such a thing would be unmistresslike after all.

The following day passed like a blur for Shián. She was distracted, finding it impossible to focus herself or order her thoughts. Could she do it? Could she pull it off?

A plan had formed in her head after meeting Uργο the day before. If she could seduce the man, if she could convince him to break the rules, if she could convince him to fuck her she could be free from mistress Burnhide's punishments. Shián would have to tell the bitch what had happened of course but then she would have leverage, then she could blackmail Burnhide by threatening to reveal what her husband had done.

That wasn't the only reason Shián was distracted though. She was excited. It was a strange nervous excitement but she knew why she felt it. She knew she lived in a school of whores, they taught many things but primarily they taught the pleasures of the flesh. Up until now Shián's only sexual experiences had been with other women, she wanted to try it with a man. Shián wanted to know what it felt like to have a man inside her and Uργο was not an unattractive man.

So Shián waited, attended her lessons and projected an outward calm she did not feel. Uργο would be there, she was sure and she was just as sure of her ability to seduce him.

Her lessons ended on time and Shián rushed to the baths. Most days she would stop long in the baths, making sure to relax in the steam rooms for a time as most of the students did, but not today. Shián's nervousness had almost reached the levels where she couldn't contain her excitement; twice she caught herself smiling whilst staring into space. It wouldn't do for any of her friends to see that, they knew her too well; they'd know something was happening.

Shián stopped in her room to brush her hair, reapply make up and to choose the right perfume. She chose an interesting scent made from jasmine; it smelled a lot like Burnhide's favourite perfume only with a fresher fragrance.

Then she was ready. She pulled her brown robe up around her body and fastened it with the belt. It wasn't the ideal garment for seducing a man, she knew, but she had no choice, if she was caught wearing anything else without a mistresses' permission she would receive immediate punishment. Shián had heard one story of a girl who'd had her mirror taken away for just such a punishment. Shián wouldn't risk that, nor would she risk missing her rendezvous with Uργο.

Shián tried to slow her pace on her way to the garden, it was not easy. She had so much restless energy she felt like running or skipping her way there but she made sure to walk and tried to look as though she had a reason to be out.

Then Shián reached the garden and her spirits dropped. Uργο wasn't the only one in the there. Three younger students sat on one of the benches whispering to each other and giggling. Shián cursed under her breath. A very unmistresslike action. Composing herself she walked into the garden and seated herself on one of the benches close to the younger students. She had to find some way to make them leave.

The younger students started whispering in even quieter tones and Shián feigned disinterest for a time. They were too quiet now to hear, not that listening in would have made a difference.

It looked as though Uργο had almost finished the repairs to the window. He glanced backwards and Shián caught his eye. The man blushed bright red even through his beard and looked away. Shián suppressed a smile; it was time to deal with the company.

She stared at the younger girls until one of them noticed. The whispering stopped and the girls kept looking away, glancing back now and then to check whether Shián was still watching. Shián narrowed her eyes hoping to give the impression of suspicion. It worked. The girls began to look guilty, they had been there to watch Uργο and both they and Shián knew it. Within minutes the girls stood and departed the garden, making sure they didn't catch Shián's eyes as they went. At last she was alone with Uργο.

Shián didn't approach right away. For a while she just watched Uργο work. He was very confident in his work but Shián's presence was making him nervous. Over and again Uργο would look up from his work, see Shián watching him and blush, looking away. Shián couldn't help but smile, doing something wrong and against the rules felt good.

Judging the time was right Shián stood and walked over. She passed behind Uργο, trailing a hand across his back. Uργο turned towards her looking guilty.

"We shouldn't..." he began but Shián could see the hunger in his eyes.

"I dreamed of you last night," Shián lied. "It was... enjoyable. Did you dream of me?"

Uργο swallowed. "I've been able to think of little else."

"That must have been nice for you," Shián said taking a step forward. She was almost pressed up against him as she rubbed the bulge in his trousers.

"Is there anywhere more private we can go?" Shián asked.

"There's a storage cupboard, just over there."

A storage cupboard, how romantic for my first time. Shián thought but had no time to complain. Uργο grabbed her by the wrist and started walking towards the cupboard. Shián couldn't have resisted if she'd tried, he was so strong.

Once inside Uργο closed the door and turned back towards Shián. It was big for a cupboard but there wasn't enough space to lie down. Though she had never practised it, Shián knew the theory behind sex while stood up. She undid the belt around her robe and let the garment fall to the floor. She stood naked in front of mistress Burnhide's husband.

Uργο surged forward, pressing Shián up against the wall and he kissed her. It was so unlike kissing another girl Shián was shocked. Uργο wasn't gentle; there was a harsh urgency to his lips. It was not unpleasant.

Uργο fumbled with his belt for a moment before dropping his trousers, and then he guided himself inside Shián.

Shián gasped upon entry. Partly because she knew men liked it, the school had taught her that, and partly because of the pain. She hadn't expected it to hurt.

Uργο held her suspended of the floor, her legs splayed out to the sides, and began to thrust. Shián held on to him, her back against the wall, and moaned in his ear. It seemed to spur him on.

When the climax came Shián didn't have to fake it like she had expected she would. She'd been told many men failed to pleasure women but Uργο seemed to have no such problems, he was married to a mistress after all. Shián trembled and gasped and had to bite Uργο's shoulder to stop herself from screaming. For his part Uργο only grunted as he deposited his seed inside of her, then his shoulders slumped and he leaned against Shián, panting. Shián did the same.

Urgo removed himself from Shián and stepped away. Shián felt between her legs, it had been messier than she had expected. Urgo was staring at her. Shián knew she should say something, she had been trained to do this but her mind was a blank.

She stepped onto her robe and pulled it up around her body, re-tying the belt and then she fled. Shián didn't look back; she pushed through the door, ran from the garden, and then slowed down to a quick walk towards her room. When she got there she didn't undress, didn't prepare for sleep, she just collapsed onto her bed, buried her head in her pillow and wished she could cry.

Shián started as she heard the bang. She was in her room but she had never been quick to wake from sleep. It had taken her a long time to fall asleep the night before. She had laid there on her bed reliving the encounter with Urgo again and again in her head, trying to sort through the jumbled mess of emotions she felt.

She had done it! She had had sex with a man, with her mistress' husband. She should have felt overjoyed, she was a woman now. But all last night she had been a confused mess, wanting to cry but unable to figure out why. At some point she must have fallen asleep.

Then Shián remembered the bang that had woken her, it was the door to her room being slammed.

"Up, Crowfeather," came mistress Burnhide's cold voice.

Does she know?

Shián rolled out of bed and stood to face her mistress. She realised she was still wearing her brown robe from the day before but she found she didn't care.

"Yes, mistress."

"Are you ill?" Mistress Burnhide asked, her eyes were narrowed to slits.

"No, mistress."

"Then there can be no excuse. You're late for your morning lessons."

Mistress Burnhide raised her hand to slap Shián. Shián was waiting for it; she stepped backwards out of Burnhide's reach. The ageing mistress stopped, shocked by her student's action.

"You won't be punishing me, hag. In fact you'll never punish me again," Shián said, defiance making her bold.

"How dare you..." Mistress Burnhide said taking a step forward, and then she stopped and sniffed at Shián. "You smell of sex."

"Yes I suppose I do." Shián said grinning. "I'm surprised your husband didn't."

Burnhide's eyes widened in shock and she paled even beneath the makeup.

"You'll never punish me again because if you do I'll tell the school your husband fucked me." Shián said, her victory giving her confidence. "I believe the punishment is quite severe."

Mistress Burnhide said nothing; she stood staring at Shián for a moment longer then turned and walked out the door, closing it behind her. A moment later Shián heard the click of the lock.

Confused Shián walked to the door and tried the handle, it didn't move. She approached her desk, took out her hair brush and looked into her oval mirror.

"Now what?" she asked her reflection.

Later that day one of the serving girls unlocked the door and brought Shián a wash basin, a sponge and a small tray of plain food. Shián ignored the girl until she left; locking the door behind her, and then fell upon the food. It felt like days since she had last eaten. After that she washed herself, cleaning off the sweat and the evidence of Urgo. Then, when no one else came to her door, Shián lay down and slept.

The next day passed much the same. Her door stayed locked and was only opened when the serving girl entered to bring her food and tidy her room. Shián subdued her anger; this was punishment and no mistake. Burnhide would soon regret it.

On the fifth day of her incarceration Shián attempted to talk to the serving girl. The plain-

looking girl wouldn't so much as look at Shián let alone talk to her so Shián made for the door. A burly eunuch stepped into her path, blocking her. Shián knew he would stop her from leaving no matter what so she returned to her room and resorted to glaring at the annoying half-man.

Days seemed to turn into weeks and still nothing changed. Shián's frustration grew and grew. With no window she could only tell time by when the serving girl entered the room. Shián slept when her candles died and woke when the serving girl arrived to replace them. Boredom soon became a constant companion and Shián decided to practice her skills, having no partner made it more difficult but the school had taught her plenty of skills to practice.

Then, one day the door opened and instead of the serving girl Shián had expected, a man stood in the doorway, a man Shián knew all too well.

"Come daughter, now," Shián's father said from the doorway.

Shián looked around her room to decide what she would take. Her father being here could only mean one thing. Shián had been expelled from the school of mistresses. As far as she knew such a thing had never before happened. Shián wondered whether mistress Burnhide had explained why.

"You need those things, not." Come, daughter, now," her father said, a hard edge to his voice.

Shián held her head high and walked from the room, following her father through the school towards the exit. There were no mistresses about, no students to see her go, not even her friends. Even mistress Burnhide was absent. Shián would have expected the old bitch to be there to gloat on her final victory at least.

One mistress stood at the school door with a set of keys. Shián's father nodded to the mistress and apologised for his daughter. Shián kept her mouth shut and her eyes on the floor. It was strange but she felt embarrassed.

Then they were outside on the doorstep to the desert. Two horses waited for them and Shián's father gestured to one before helping Shián mount and then climbed atop the other horse himself. Then they set off.

"I'm sorry, father," Shián said in a voice that sounded small. "I've brought disgrace to the tribe. I'm... are you so angry?"

Harlow Stormborne turned toward his daughter with sympathy in his eyes. He looked no different to Shián than the day he had left her there three years ago.

"Angry, I am not, daughter. Punish you, I won't. Punish yourself, I think is enough." With that he pointed to something to the other side of Shián.

Shián looked. There hanging from one of the sparse trees of the desert was Uργο. He had been stripped, had his genitals removed and had been hanged as a warning and as punishment for one who knew the rules and had broken them. Kneeling on the ground before Uργο's body was a woman. She looked old, defeated. Her once black hair now more grey than black, her make up gone, and her head buried in her hands as she wept.

Shián turned away and for the first time in three years she felt hot tears coursing down her face. She shook, she couldn't stop the shaking, couldn't stop the tears. It was all her fault; she had killed Uργο as surely as if she'd tied the rope around his neck herself.

Then she felt a big hand grip her shoulder. Her father had moved his horse closer to comfort his daughter. Still Shián wept as her father led the way into the desert, back towards their home.

