

Daylight waned in the neatly-arranged room, yet the painted fabrics on the walls still seemed to glow.

Yeshe sat at a small desk, writing with edged bamboo pens. At sixteen, she radiated a poised and natural beauty. Her calligraphy was flawless.

Yeshe's father, Kharchenpa, stepped into the room, followed by her mother, Getso.

Kharchenpa, obsessed with an earlier conversation, reminded his daughter, "We have turned away all who have asked to take you in marriage. So far."

"Thank you, dear father," replied Yeshe, "To realize the highest Buddhadharma is all I crave. I cannot waste this human life."

Kharchenpa had heard it before. "One day, you may find time for hobbies, such as your way of writing. But now, Yeshe Tsogyal, you must marry."

Yeshe leapt to her feet and explained, "A man would delay the precious culmination of many lifetimes. Please accept me and honor my decision."

Kharchenpa stood firm. "Here is your decision: Today, two princes of honored Tibetan families have arrived, each with plentiful offerings. Either would be an acceptable husband for you. You may choose between them."

"I chose neither."

"You must choose which Prince shall have you!"

"Have me? How can anyone have me? Can a man have the moon?" She cried out to her other parent, "Mother!"

Getso joined the fray. "This is as it always has been. You have spirit and curiosity now, but you'll learn reality with time."

"Time! What need have I for time, save to pray for all trapped in the thick of it?"

"You are a woman," shouted Getso.

"If being a woman is my curse, I wish I had never taken this body."

Kharchenpa wrapped it up: "Don't speak nonsense. You will be married. We cannot let this opportunity pass."

At dawn, three men restrained their eager horses by the gates of a dusty courtyard. Two wore uniforms of their respective provinces. Further from the gates, uniformed riders attended several other horses.

Townspeople gathered and jockeyed for a view.

Prince Zhonnu walked out of Kharchenpa's house with Minister Shantipa. Both wore green-themed garments.

Zhonnu paused and looked Shantipa in the eye. "You must make certain that I win this girl, Minister."

"Have no doubt, my prince," assured Shantipa, "Behold your feckless rival from Surkhar." He gestured toward a young man in a yellow uniform.

Shantipa backed away as Prince Wangchuk of Surkhar greeted Zhonnu.

Kharchenpa spoke to the two princes, reiterating, "One more time: Whichever of you who captures my daughter shall have her as his wife, upon payment. The other shall accept the outcome, or the Emperor will hear of the matter. Do you agree?"

The house door flung open. Yeshe dashed to the three eager horses and jumped onto one as its handler fell away. Zhonnu and Wangchuk ran to their horses, but the teenager had a substantial lead. A dozen more horses and riders joined the chase.

For most of the day, the reluctant bride eluded her hunters over plains, rugged trails, and, finally, into a thick forest. A small stream in the woods gave Yeshe and the horse a chance to drink. She splashed water on her face and chest and picked a few leaves to chew. Sitting against a boulder, she fell asleep.

At the edge of the forest, Shantipa dismounted and examined the ground. His horse followed as the minister slithered his powerful build into the forest. Within an hour, he discovered the napping Yeshe. Too late, her horse announced the intruder.

Yeshe opened her eyes and saw the foreboding Shantipa. She tried to scramble away. He grabbed her hair in one strong hand.

"Yeshe Tsogyal, I am Minister Shantipa in service to Prince Zhonnu of Kharchu. It's all over now. I've caught you." He beamed, satisfied with his own words.

Yeshe retorted, "You might take a body to Kharchu, but you won't take me. In fact, you won't take this body."

Yeshe ground her feet against a boulder, and it temporarily turned to mud. She shoved her legs in past her knees. The stone re-solidified.

Shantipa tugged at her, but she didn't budge. He tore at her clothes until she was nearly naked. He grabbed at her body with his large hands.

"Come with me or die."

"Then kill me. I don't care."

Shantipa grabbed a whip from his coat and snapped Yeshe. He beat her with his fists.

"You will be the wife of Prince Zhonnu."

"These human births are hard to find. How did you find a body that looks like a man yet is pure evil?"

Shantipa beat and whipped Yeshe until she bled from her back, arms, face, and breasts. Finally, she submitted and released herself from the boulder.

That evening, in a long room deep in the forest, several men from Kharchu celebrated the capture of young Yeshe, who found herself chained to the substructure.

Very softly, Yeshe began to sing a haunting song. Gradually, the men began to listen, subconsciously at first. Yeshe gradually increased the volume as the men fell into a deep sleep.

Yeshe stood and walked, free from the chains that had bound her. She took her pick of clothes, blankets, provisions, and a horse. She tied Shantipa to a large table using knots that would not release for a fortnight.P