

## DAS GIFT

Life had not been easy for Keith. His mother had preferred his sister, Karen. His father had deserted the family for a younger woman. There was not even any consolation at school. The other boys were only interested in football and the girls spent their time in closed huddles before shouting out comments to the boys and then giggling amongst themselves.

Work was no better. Keith was ignored, promotion being given to those who were prepared to sell their souls to seek the approbation of the boss. Splashing through the puddles on his walk home one day, Keith spied a pretty young woman behind the counter of a shop. The establishment advertised Reflexology. Keith walked in.

'Can I help you sir?'

'I wondering what it would cost.'

'Oh, the initial consultation is free.'

'And do you, are you the, you know, the consultant, the person who does it?'

'If you mean, am I the person who provides the service, I can be.'

A smile crossed Keith's lips.

'And would I, I mean, could I, choose who was...'

'Well, I think you ought to know that the cost is £50 a session.'

'£50?!'

'Look, why don't we start with the free consultation. I can arrange it so that you are seen by me.'

Never in his life had such a young, attractive woman shown such an interest in Keith.

Four days later Keith and Daisy were seated opposite one another in a back room.

'Tell me.'

'Tell you what?'

'Why you decided to come here.'

'Well, it's like... I mean. You know, I just wanted to feel better. Some mates, well, I haven't really got any mates, some people, like in the office where I work... they were talking when they should've been working. They were saying that all this stuff, reflexology stuff, can be really good if you're not feeling so great and everything.'

'So, you came here.'

'I didn't mean to come here. I was just passing. I remembered what they'd said, and I saw you through the window, so I kinda thought it would be good to come in.'

'You saw me through the window. Is that the reason you came in?'

At that moment Daisy lowered her head, smiling and making eye contact with Keith.

‘Do I?... Why? Well, yes, kinda.’

‘Because if you want... Look, I’ve got to keep my voice down in case my boss hears me.’

‘Yeah, I’ve got problems with my boss.’

‘That’s something we’ve got in common then.’ Daisy’s smile broadened. ‘If you want, we can forget about all this reflexology stuff and I can introduce you to some of my friends. They can help you, much better too, and for nothing.’

‘Really?’

‘You won’t tell anyone I said this will you? Cross your heart.’

A slow nod, accompanied by eyes that were transfixed, gave the reply.

One month later, Keith left his home and his job, and accompanied Daisy in her car to the Irati Forest, high in the Spanish Pyrenees. She stopped the car and switched off the engine before she repeated the mantra that had accompanied their journey.

‘When you meet him, you must bow and swear allegiance. That is if you want to find everlasting enlightenment.’

‘Of course.’

An hour later, and Keith was surrounded by young, beautiful women, dressed in orange robes, their faces betraying nothing but the seriousness of the occasion. They all bowed as Roshi, or ‘the old master’ entered.

‘Dress him! He who resists will not enter this kingdom.’

‘Yes, master,’ came the chorused reply.

Then Daisy removed her coat to reveal a garb to match those of the other women.

‘Come, join me.’

As she removed each item of Keith’s clothing to replace it with orange silk, she was careful not to make eye contact before the deed was done, when she was permitted to smile, once again, into his eyes.

‘You are no longer the person you were. You are now Sami,’ boomed the voice.

‘Sami,’ repeated the circle of women.

‘Welcome, Sami,’ repeated the lips, which had formerly belonged to Daisy, who was now Hetti. ‘Welcome to our journey. But you will have to follow Roshi to find true enlightenment.’

‘I understand.’

For the next year Sami was taken on the road to enlightenment, leaving all connection with the old, corrupted, world behind him. He had experiences that he could not have imagined in his former life. For the first time, he had physical contact with women, but only with the permission of Roshi, and never to the extent that he lost his virginity. Such a privilege was for Roshi only.

Sami learned so much. He learned that he had left behind a world of sin, that there was only one true path to enlightenment, and that everyone was there to serve the one true god who had taken human form within the group.

The day arrived. Sami, having earned the right to be elevated to a higher plane, was to make that transition. It had been made by many men before him, but not women, unless they were old, because young women were not worthy of such a transition. It was only by receiving the blessing and favours of Roshi that they would arrive at the next stage of spiritual embodiment.

Surrounded by the circle of saffron-clad women, Sami knelt before Roshi. Hetti was the third person to make up the ceremony, standing by Roshi's side. By introducing Sami to the group, Hetti had earned the privilege of spending a night of bliss with Roshi.

Roshi handed Sami a cup. 'This is my gift to you,' he announced. 'Take it and you will receive the gift of enlightenment.'

Sami imbibed the liquid, before slumping forward, never to breathe on this Earth again. Each of the women then took the branch of a tree and beat Sami across the back, whilst chanting the words of enlightenment.

Roshi, a German by birth, had given Sami 'das Gift', the German word for poison.