

Satori

A Fictional work by Holly Selvey

Dedicated to the memory of the late Tudor Box Hanshi

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The gleaming gilt of the single-edged sword glinted precariously in the daylight as Sensei Selvey sliced into the defenseless bamboo. The face of disdain and triumph straightened as he lightly tapped the sword to scatter any traces of illusive blood. He meticulously returned the sword to its sheath, admiring the handcrafted hana glowing in its precious glory. Sensei Selvey bowed, observing the sacred rights of combat, and withdrew. Michael now stood fighter, friend and disciple, still clasping his sword. Tudor could no longer mask his pride, so long concealed behind the face of discipline. His halo of untidy white hair reflected the rays of sunlight around them; Michael thought how ironic it was for a Buddhist to look so angelic. Tudor spontaneously shook his head as if he had heard the thought; he was never one for iconic sentimentality. As his creaking bones allowed him to stand, Tudor sought support from his own sword, long since entombed within its black silk brocade. The inseparable pair could not have been more different. Yet there was one thing that inextricably linked them; determination.

Buddha tells us that miracles are possible and today I witnessed one. A student so full of promise; he reminds me of myself, and at such a young age. Though I have to say he possesses something special. Something sets him apart, makes him stand out, like Mount Fuji against the blank skyline. I think he is the one. He has achieved Satori, true self-enlightenment, without even a lesson or parable to reveal to him Buddha's power. Neither you nor I achieved this at such a young age; his innocence and insight have allowed him to surpass us both. I am getting older now, wiser but less agile. I need a protégé to carry the legacy, to ensure that life is not consumed by the greed we are all too familiar with. Tomio I need your acceptance to initiate him. He has determination, passion, strength, agility and fears nothing. He is a Samurai. He holds the desire to search for the truth, to protect. Buddha says all things are equal and the way of the sword is to respect its power, now we must respect his.

As Michael entered the training room the sharp, sweet scent of sweat and the sulphurous perfume of burning matches fizzed inside his nostrils. In the centre of the tiny prefabricated hut sat a white-haired man, sleeping soundly, lulling his student with the lapping of his shallow breath, like waves on the shore. The flickering tongue of a flame caught Michael's attention, drawing him further into the room. In the corner sat a small, round-bellied man lovingly surrounded by a glimmering array of candles. 'Hand carved from the wood of the box tree.' Michael turned to see the white haired man standing behind him, observing every movement, absorbing every reaction.

The small wooden Buddha seemed so life-like; each precise stroke of the carpenter's chisel swept away any false impressionism, each meticulously carved feature revealed an unknown yet somehow understood emotion. Tudor studied each reaction, every muscle spasm and movement, willing them to reveal any weakness in his young student, he saw none. 'Buddha taught us that humanity needs to destroy all greed, hatred and delusion in order to achieve self-enlightenment. The tree from which this was carved is as much alive as you or I and therefore it becomes one of us, an equal. Buddha is as much in this wood as he is in either of us. You and the nature around you, humanity and all those within it are the route to enlightenment; not money, not gifts, not vanity'. Tudor placed the carving of Buddha back into the shrine and pinched the surrounding flames, which hissed as they ceased like snakes in defense.

To Michael this microcosm of information eclipsed a lifetime of Christian teachings and had transformed Tudor from the sheltered figure seen meditating moments before, to a teacher and warrior, doubled in size and status. Now adorned in the sacred armour of the samurai, Tudor carried as protectively as a parent his sword beneath his arm. He approached Michael who at eight years old was neither scared nor intimidated by the sudden transformation. Tudor knelt before him and presented him with the honour of carrying his sword. As he received it, the silver hana that lovingly decorated the handle bloomed into delicate pink blossoms, the petals of which caught stray droplets of the rain that subtly fell around them. As Michael looked up he found himself immersed in an oasis, discovered only by the most enlightened minds. As Satori eclipsed his previous existence, he achieved an understanding so complex most adults fail to discover it. There were trees, plants and fruits of unimagined varieties; pink trees, rubber trees, trees that grew fruits with faces, flowers that blossomed inside out, plants with

green flowers and stems of amethyst, potatoes that grew on trees and apples that grew under ground. Butterflies flew effortlessly with mirrored wings that reflected the colours of the rainbow above them, created by the spectral rain that fell from a sapphire sky.

For the first time in his short life, Michael felt free; free of social, religious and familial constraints, free of his mother's torment and his father's tyranny, free of a life not yet destroyed by greed but slowly suffocated by it. A life now existed where frogs barked and birds sang songs in a language understood by man. Tudor attempted to explain the vivacity of this new world that surrounded them, but words were a superfluous indulgence as it was not an explanation needed but an affirmation of realisation. 'Youth and innocence are a marriage of equal minds, the way of the Samurai and the teachings of Buddha are inextricably linked. This is a way of life, a journey of discovery and by unveiling the truth you can create the path to enlightenment.'

As the wooden slats began to reappear around them, encasing them within reality, every sense became heightened and life became enlightened by the scent of imagined flowers, the iridescent colours of nature and the promise of a life enriched by knowledge. This is the promise you make. Each time you hold that sword, each time you enter for battle, whether physical or mental, you pledge your soul to the discovery of truth, to the disdain of greed and to the end of suffering. This sword is a sacred tool with which to protect, and to abuse its power is to succumb to the cause of the downfall of man.' Michael, although still a child, carried the knowledge of an adult as effortlessly as the wind carries the petals of spring. Tudor's words were not something new or shocking; they simply reaffirmed a deep rapport already established between him and nature.

Tudor seems distracted lately. His mind wonders, thinking of things I know nothing of, a life I never knew. If he would only open up and see that his stubborn denial of the past will achieve nothing. We were training the other day and he wrapped his sword up and simply said that he had 'finished', his 'life's work was done'. I have so much more to learn. Ten years he has taught me, but there are things I still don't understand, things I think I'll never understand. If only Tomio were still here, our link between East and West, old and new; his old Japanese proverbs ringing in our ears reminding us to carry our swords with pride and respect. I fear if he lets go of this he will let go of life. Tomio once said that a wise man may know many people, but it's true enlightenment to know yourself. How can he truly know himself, be truly enlightened?

As Tudor lay on the floor his eyes slowly regaining focus, blinking away the sweat as a shadowed figure stood towering above him, the recognition of finality rang in his ears like the tolling bells of a monastery. Above him he saw the faces of each opponent he had ever encountered, simultaneously fleet in the eyes of the figure above him. He knew it was over. Michael moved swiftly away from his ageing Sensei, hoping not to embarrass him with the creeping realisation of his incurring fragility. 'Genghis Khan once said that "For their sins, God unleashed me on the world". I want to know what sins I committed for him to unleash you on me.' Michael held Tudor's hand and helped him rise to his feet like a child from a fall. Tudor knew there was nothing more for him to teach and nothing left to learn. He had spent his life training, trying to create a new generation of believers to respect Buddha's teachings and promote a world with more love and respect and less greed. There was just one lesson left to teach, one thing more for his only student to learn; the importance of having nothing left to learn.

In order to get into Nirvana one must have learnt each lesson life has to teach. If not, you will be reincarnated until all one hundred and eight have been achieved. Michael saw Tudor as a frail child and thought how dramatically the tables had turned. He wanted to show Tudor how grateful he was for the life he had given him, for rescuing him from the inferno that was his life before, where he once lay simmering in his own ignorance. They had become father and son, brothers, friends, and it burned Michael to see his mentor physically defeated by age, though never mentally. 'I want you to know that I am more proud of you than I could ever have thought possible. You have no more to learn and I have no more to teach. Now it is your turn to share our gift with the world. Let them know what we know; it is on your shoulders now to educate them into enlightenment. If there is one more lesson I can teach you it is this: cherish every moment you can savour, allow your children to become a part of this as I never did, and remember, Satori is the path to life.' Just as Tudor had mystically appeared in Michael's life he was suddenly gone, leaving behind him a legacy that would improve life for all.

For those who achieve true greatness with their lives, it is not the physical being that is mourned when they are gone, but the spirit they shared and the lives they influenced. Tudor was more than just a teacher, he was a master, a warrior and a friend.

His ashes are to be released here at the base of Mount Fuji, for only the greatest deserve to be equal with such powerful nature.

As Michael exhibited the final sword display he had learnt from Tudor, slicing through the sodden bamboo, flicking the traces of blood that would never be shed, his daughter Hana observed respectfully, absorbed by the mysterious rapport her father held with nature and his sacred sword. Michael felt instinctively that he was being watched from a far off place where nature is omnipotent and greed condemned. Michael had come to realise that Tudor's lessons all lead to one conclusion, that true Satori was not something imagined or discovered only by the dead, it was here on earth all along, but humanity would have to believe and be willing to understand before it would reveal itself.