

The Fifth Acolyte Reader



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Wild Horizon

by Alan Edward

It came about some years ago that an Englishman was traveling in the far north of India, close to the border with Tibet. He had been drawn to this harsh and inhospitable region by a tale he had heard whispered in the bazaars of Allahabad and then, further north and with more conviction, in Lucknow and Amristar. It was said that in a vast monastery halfway towards the peaks of the mighty Himalayas dwelt the all-powerful spiritual and temporal ruler of that region, in great splendor, closely guarded, and attended by more than a thousand monks, guards and warriors. This ruler was, he learned, a young boy of singular beauty, picked by signs and portents at birth, according to ancient custom, on the death of the old ruler, the Dorje-Buddha. The Englishman, Smithers, had seen a statue of the boy, an exquisite figure in a temple doorway, and had dared to run his hand over the cold smooth limbs, until dark looks from a temple attendant had sent him off.

Now the north of India was then, and still is, infested with boy-rulers, little godlings and mini-Buddhas. But there was more. Muttered to Smithers by a half-drunk maharaja for whom he had smuggled a liter of near-lethal Indian 'Scotch' over the Nepalese border. So he marched for three days through the passes and foothills of the Himalayas with only a Sherpa sardar and two bearers. It would not have been easy for a mere pee-ling to enter such a place as the monastery at Pjador (as closed from the world as the Forbidden City itself), but Smithers had friends, powerful friends, who appreciated the fire-water carried over the border every night, especially those with the 'Scotch' labels fashioned and affixed to them by his friend Ahmed the Dubious in Kashmir, a truly great artist.

At the end of the last pass, on the very lip of a terrifying cliff, the monastery rose halfway to the stars. A temple horn sounded, then faded, as the bell was rung, and the door opened. Smithers was introduced; the robed and shaven-headed monk bowed. 'We have heard of the great Smee-Tu. Please to follow me. The Dorje-Buddha will give his daily audience in a few moments. You shall be the honored guest.'

The audience hall, three of its walls carved from the cliff itself, was vast; it was hung with rich curtains; golden statues and effigies stood in every cranny. Monks knelt in rows, but there were also some villagers,

probably with prayers and petitions. Smithers was conducted to the front, near to a raised altar area. Then a gong sounded from high above, a group of priest-attendants entered and there was a waft of incense. More candles were lit, a curtain was drawn aside. Then, arms upraised, the slim figure of the Dorje-Buddha stood before them.

'My God!' gasped Smithers, unable to help himself. So it was true.

'Sssh!' warned the guide. Then, 'You are surprised, master?'

'No. But...'

'There is no need to be. You have seen how the holy men of India go naked. This is a holy boy. Holiness is perfection, and perfection needs no cloak. They are not as we ordinary mortals.'

Maybe his head should have been submissively bowed, but for Smithers that was impossible. He had to take in everything of what he saw, every square millimeter of the utter perfection (how right the Sherpa sardar had been!) on the dais in front of him. The boy would have been little more than twelve years old in English terms, with the slimness of boyhood, yet with a childish roundness about the thighs and hips that contrasted a little with the dignity he carried as he moved hither and thither about the altar. Bells sounded, censers were swung, the Dorje-Buddha gravely bowing, accepting petitions, making signs of blessing in each direction. His face, relatively light-skinned, was a perfect oval, curtained with long dark hair on either side; his large liquid eyes, fractionally slanted, were grave and expressionless. He wore only a pair of ornate slippers and a great jewel around his neck that caught the million candle-lights in the hall, flashing and flickering.

The great jewel was not however the only beautiful thing that hung in front of the boy, nor was it all that quivered and bobbed wonderfully as the boy-Buddha descended a flight of steps from the dais to hear the petitions of some disabled villagers at its foot. Seeing everything closer still, Smithers swallowed. The boy was flawless; this was living sculpture.

Then it was over. The Dorje-Buddha climbed the stairs and a curtain was drawn.

A monk plucked at his sleeve. 'Your private audience, Smee-Tu.'

The boy lay on cushions, monk-attendants on each side. The jewel now hung above him; his other incomparable possession lay curled against his smooth thigh. His eyes were so deep that they seemed almost without pupils, his expression impossible to read.

'Welcome to the monastery of Pjador-La, O Smee-Tu,' he said in hesitant English.

Smithers bowed. 'My Lord Buddha, may I compliment you on your command of our language.'

The boy bowed in return. 'There was an English woman who taught me once. She learned me much English before the... plague have taken her.'

'I... I'm sorry.'

'They wished for me to learn English,' said the young Buddha. He had a reassuringly boyish habit of repeatedly pushing his long hair back from his face. 'They say I am to be a great ruler and must comm – comm –'

'Communicate,' said Smithers. Under the guise of shifting to a more comfortable position, he moved forward on his cushion a little. No – not a single hair – or at least not one visible from here. Or did they clip him? They hadn't cut anything else. Smithers approved.

He said, 'With regard to the English, if I might be of assistance...?'

'You will have tea, Smee-Tu?'

The boy-Buddha conferred with the acolytes, the acolytes conferred with the priests, the priests conferred with the High Priests, then Geoffrey Smithers Esq was installed as English tutor to the Dorje-Buddha, prince and ruler.

They began that evening. Shortly after the commencement of the lesson, Smithers decided that it would only be possible to continue if they both sat on either side of a small table. After that, there was only a glimpse of bare rounded hip to distract him from the printed page.

'It is time to prepare for bed, my lord,' murmured one of the young monks at length.

'You will continue the lesson while I have my bath,' said the boy. 'The English Missus said the custom was not to waste time, yes?'

Soon, amid scented steam but with dry lips, Smithers read, 'I go, you go, he went, they will go,' while the boy repeated after him in a high clear voice. He was bathed standing upright in a wide basin by two monk-attendants little older than himself. Pouring scented soaps into their hands from tall vials, they gently rubbed and lathered every tiny inch of the boy, at the most delicate areas lifting, moving to one side and then another, soaping underneath. Then lifting everything to wash as far up between the thighs as possible, gently parting his legs. And turning him, bending him, the soaped hand, rubbing a shade more diligently, making exquisitely tender flesh tremble wonderfully. Then, legs open once more; one monk-attendant holds the delectable cheeks apart while the other, still bare-handed, busily soaps the soft warm cleft between.

'I come, you come...' Smithers was unable to hold his book, and put it down.

The whole process is repeated, this time with plain warm water. And finally the boy-Buddha is dried again, inch by inch, by both monks together, with large soft towels.

How *do* you get a job like that? Smithers began to wonder how he would look with a shaved head.

Next day, the lessons proceeded well. At one point, the boy, wishing to concentrate, pushed his chair back from the table, and Smithers' own concentration failed again. Just what was it, he wondered, that was so utterly breathtaking about the inner curve of a boy's upper thigh, somehow even more attractive when widened by contact, as now, with the edge of the chair. If he put a hand on it – brushed it as by accident – what would happen?

Don't even think about it, Smithers. The penalties for touching the boy-Buddha must be frightful. Slow roasting over the monastery fire, perhaps, or simply having your head chopped off with a scimitar. He didn't believe that about the English governess and the plague.

Then fate took its part. The boy had torn up some paper and a small piece lodged right on his thigh. If he paused to think he couldn't have done it, but Smithers leaned quickly forward and brushed it off.

On balance, he would prefer the scimitar; it would be quicker.

'A piece of paper,' he explained. Then, as if suddenly recollecting himself, 'Oh, pardon me. I know I must not touch you. Pardon me; I forgot.'

The boy pushed his hair back and said evenly, 'It is the soul of the Buddha that is sacred, not the body. My body is nothing. It hold the soul of the Buddha for a time, then the soul do pass to another body.'

Smithers cleared his throat. 'In England, when we have great esteem for someone, we show it by touching, by stroking their body. May I show my regard for you in this way?'

The boy shrugged, eyes on his book. 'If you wish. It is no matter. I am, you are. I was, you was... You *were*. Oh, it is not easy, this English.'

Smithers' palm encircled the boyish knee, then moved up, sliding, stroking. He remembered stroking the smooth marble of the statue. But this was even smoother, warm and full of infinitesimal movements and responses in its aliveness. Now the boy was continuing from his reader.

'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. Creeps in...'

Moving his chair closer, Smithers could reach a little further. His

fingers brushed the tender skin of the scrotum, and then, momentarily... *it*. Firm but quite soft. The boy read on, his voice steady, eye on the page.

'And all our yesterdays have lighted fools...'

Breath held, Smithers encircled the boy's exquisite possession with his hand and began sliding it up and down, slowly at first.

'You wanted to learn English customs,' he said quietly. 'This is one.'

'It is what a small boy's ayah do in our country to comfort him at night,' said the boy-Buddha dismissively.

'But when an English boy is near to coming of age,' said Smithers. 'When he is a child no longer. Then...'

He speeded up, tightening his grip a little. And it was hardening now, straightening, rising in his grasp.

The boy read gallantly on, but his voice shook a little. 'Out, out, brief c-candle...'

It was an awkward position, his arm half under the table. Smithers shifted his position and paused for a moment.

The boy looked at him and swallowed. 'Please go on,' he whispered. For a millisecond he was no longer the boy-Buddha. Then he resumed his reading. 'A p-poor player, who s-s-struts...'

Smithers continued, his grip tight, as fast and as vigorously as he could now. The boy had begun to quiver from top to toe; Smithers could feel his thighs beginning to shake, to close in tight on his hand, move out again, close again. Despite himself the boy began to shift and writhe, slowly, on his seat. Small noises, gasps, punctuated the reading.

'It is a t-tale, t-t-told by an id-id...'

Smithers had pushed the table partly aside; half-kneeling on the floor, he worked even more furiously than before, and the boy twisted yet more vigorously as his hips and buttocks began to contract spasmodically.

'Sig-signifying noth-noth... OH-OH-OH..! Waaaa-AAAAAAAAAH!!!'

The boy's knees had thudded up against the edge of the table, knocking it over. Eyes closed, he threw himself back on the couch, his entire body convulsing. Reaching up, he grabbed Smithers' hand and clamped it back into place, and the movement went on, mainly with the boy as prime mover, till there was another explosion and another yell. At long last the boy stopped wriggling on the couch, though Smithers' hand was still in place, the boy holding it there. At length the boy opened his eyes and looked up. Then he sat, picked up the book from the floor and handed it to Smithers. 'Thank you,' he said gravely. 'Always another

English custom I learn. Of other coming of age customs I learn too, but I think this is the most good. Now it is done, I am in – in – ?'

'Initiated? Yes, you could say that'

'Then I never have it again?' A distinct note of wistfulness.

'Not at all. Listen. In England it is what we call...'

Three days later Smithers again forgot himself. He came into the room behind Sanvay (the name of the boy-Buddha for those closest to him), seated at his work as always. The boy looked around and said, 'G'morning, Smee-Tu!' with such an impishly boyish grin – the first Smithers had remembered seeing – that he impulsively tickled the boy under both armpits. 'Morning, kid. Working hard, then?'

Sanvay squealed and squirmed. 'This too an English custom? This I like also. You will show me more?'

'On the couch, then.'

Sanvay bounced across, and soon Smithers' fingers were working hard, fast, everywhere...

The monks in nearby rooms stared at one another in amazement as delighted screams echoed through the old walls, and went on and on, reaching crescendo after crescendo. Then they smiled too; it was a sound they had not heard before, but they liked it.

Next day, when Smithers arrived to give his English lesson, the boy lay sprawled on his back on the couch, knees bent and apart, arms outspread.

'The lesson we do soon,' he said, 'but first the Tee-Kool.'

The boy-Buddha's knowledge of the more refined English customs grew apace. A few days later before lessons, Smithers, having tickled a naked, screaming, thrashing, long-legged bundle of frenetic delight all over the couch and then all over the floor, was met with another question. 'These are the best customs? Or are there others you do not tell?'

Smithers hesitated, then he said, 'There's one more thing that you do with someone you care about a lot...'

The boy's face was solemn, his black eyes fixed on Smithers'. 'You *do* care for me, Smee-Tu?' Once more the mask of the Buddha had slipped momentarily.

Smithers rose. 'You know I do. You will excuse me, there is something I must fetch from the kitchens first.'

Some time later, Sanvay was fingering his rear and looking at Smithers wide-eyed, an expression on his face Smithers had never seen before. 'What is this custom called?' he asked, almost in a whisper.

Smithers told him.

'This Vor-Keen,' said the boy-Buddha, 'you may do it again.'

Some months passed. The Buddha Sanvay progressed even further in his knowledge of English and of international affairs, with particular references to sport, and Smithers became an esteemed resident of the monastery; there was talk of making him an honorary lama. One day, a party of travelers arrived, led by two English ladies of incomparable age and immeasurable distinction. They, too, were admitted to a private audience with the Dorje-Buddha. Before they entered, their guide whispered to them. In the Presence, the English ladies blushed and momentarily lowered their eyes. Their maid took off her glasses, polished them, and put them on again. Then they exchanged compliments. They drank tea. The English ladies declared themselves impressed with the boy-Buddha's grasp of their language.

'Also I have learned the English customs,' said Sanvay.

'Really?' twittered the ladies.

The boy cleared his throat. 'There are many English customs,' he announced, 'but the finest of them is the Vor-Keen.' He addressed his attendants. 'Send to me Smee-Tu.'

'He had to leave urgently on a long journey, my lord.'

'No matter," said Sanvay. 'Bring my boy-attendant Dzasa. Then, English madames, the Vor-Keen I shall show to you.'

Filled with polite anticipation, sipping tea, the English ladies waited.