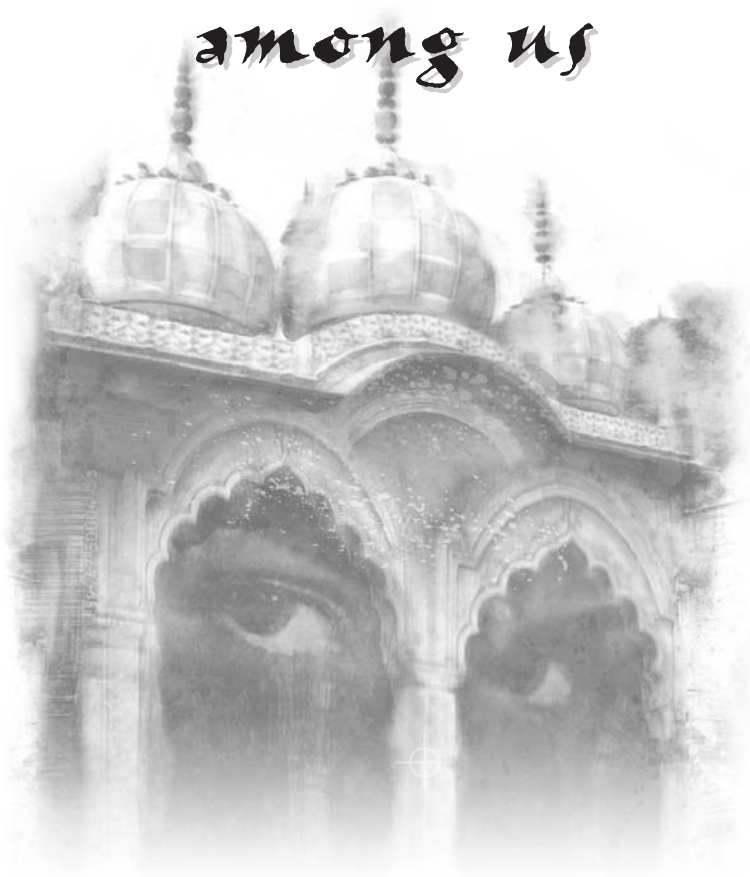


S.P. HOZY

some comfort

among us



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Some Comfort Among Us

By S.P. Hozy

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chapter one

March 1, 1987

“Dear Stephanie,

I*wish you could see this place,” Ann wrote to her daughter a month after her arrival. “India is not what you think it is, it’s much, much more. I never thought it would be so beautiful. Listening to your father all those years talking about the Raj and his ancestors and all that British pomp and circumstance, I pictured it frozen in time a place where lily-complexioned ladies wore white cotton dresses and played croquet on the lawn, and sunburned young men with blond mustaches wore topis and riding breeches and administered justice under the trees in the heat and the dust.*

“The Indians were always incidental, sweeping and serving in the background. And the country itself, the land, was a subtle

and dangerous enemy. It was full of wild animals and poisonous snakes, a breeding ground for fevers, mysterious and deadly diseases that carried off children and young women before they even unpacked their things. The drinking water was poison, the climate was unhealthy and any kind of travel was hazardous.

“I remember your father telling me the story of his grandmother who lost four babies to fever before she died of it herself. And then his father’s first wife died in childbirth. I can just picture her coming over on the boat in 1924, a young woman with her hair freshly bobbed, nervous and excited about meeting a young man in the Civil Service or a dashing young soldier to marry.

“But I’ve seen things that take my breath away, like the silken swaying of sari-clad women. I’ve heard choruses of songbirds, not just a few, but hundreds at a time; smelt the pungent fragrance of frangipani and tasted the succulence of mangoes. Sometimes I just stop and listen. There’s so much life (!) here that it makes up for all those frozen Canadian winters, those dead, hard, gray winters.

“If I seem giddy, it’s probably the vegetarian diet and the cleansing of the soul I’ve been undergoing. They tell me this isn’t unusual—it’s like waking up from a coma or taking the bandages off after surgery: you’ve been given a second chance. I know I’ll be able to look at things from a totally different perspective from now on and maybe my old hang-ups will simply fall apart like rags. Got to run. Time for massage therapy.

*Love,
Mother.”*

Stephanie closed her eyes and tried to remember the details of her mother’s face, the high, slightly prominent cheekbones, the delicately pointed chin, the small lines that appeared around her eyes when she smiled. But all she could think was how naïve her mother was to believe she could solve her problems at an

ashram halfway around the world.

“I’m going to find release from the bondage of the self,” she had told Stephanie during lunch at a fashionable downtown cafe. “I feel fragmented, unwhole. My body is separate from my mind and they’re both separate from the universe. I need to find a way to transcend these earthly bonds and feel at peace with the cosmos. No amount of reading books is enough. I have to go to India where these things happen and find a teacher to show me the way.”

“A guru, you mean?” Stephanie had asked, trying not to let her skepticism show.

“Yes, a guru. A person who has experienced enlightenment and will show me the path.” Ann wanted her daughter to understand but she knew Stephanie was only pretending to be interested. “I know it’s hard for you to take all this seriously but it’s very important to me and I want you to know I’m not just going off on a lark. I need to do this.”

“I know you do, Mother, and I’m trying to understand, but I really don’t know very much about this stuff. I mean, I hope you’re not going to join the Hare Krishna.”

Her mother had laughed but Stephanie remembered the sadness in her eyes.

“And what if I did join the Hare Krishna? Would you and your father try and get a court order to stop me, or would you give me your blessing and let me go?”

“Don’t joke about it. It’s not funny.”

“No, it’s not funny. And I’m glad you don’t think it is. I want to be taken seriously, Stephe, especially by my family. I’m not going to come back with my head shaved. I’m going to come back with a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Life Force. I’m going to come back whole.”

At that point Stephanie would have said anything just to get out of there. “All right, you can have my blessing if you want it. I hope you find what you’re looking for and I hope you bring it back with you.”

Afterward, when it was all over and the real anger hit, when all the hurt and confusion and regret surfaced, Stephanie Hobart, young, smart, fearlessly independent, would wonder why she hadn't been better equipped to deal with the events that happened over the next few months. Her memories would be of moving through those days as if on a conveyer belt, accumulating layers of emotion that would eventually suffocate her certainty.