



MOTH & THE FLAME
MOTHER INDIA!

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*T*he airliner touched down at Palam Airport, disgorging passengers into the chilly January night. I had entered another world for which nothing could have prepared me. Despite the boisterous din and babble in and about the teeming airport, I felt received and embraced by Mother India, as her children know her. I stooped and touched the tarmac with my hand, reverencing this ancient land.

After customs inspection I was greeted by Gyaniji, the articulate silver-bearded ashram secretary; Princess Khukhu, daughter of the Maharaja of Jhind; and Eileen Wigg, an Englishwoman who had lived several years in India.

Khukhu drove her jeep at high speed through the inexplicably familiar, dilapidated streets of Delhi, honking at everything in her path. A mantle of darkness and pungent mist enveloped the city. By the roadside, shawl-and-blanket-robed figures clustered around dried cow dung fires for warmth; people on bicycles appeared wraith-like in the jeep's lurching beams. Men and bullocks pulling burdens piled impossibly high on wooden carts appeared sporadically out of the gloom, around which we deftly maneuvered. India was awakening to another day.

I asked my companions if we were near the ashram yet. Hands firmly gripping the wheel, Khukhu turned around, heedless of the road, and replied, 'Every moment brings us nearer to the Master!' Her fierce devotion was proverbial. As we drew close to our destination, I closed my eyes and wept the tears of the unworthy, and in the flood, the reality of my separation dawned as I was swept towards an infinite Sea.

The car hit a big pothole, jolting me back to the external environment. Sights and smells exclusive to India impinged upon my senses. Passing through the narrow lanes of Shakti Nagar and over a clattery bridge, we arrived at Sawan Ashram. The cries of awakening birds greeted us as pink light kissed the dawning sky. Entering the ashram's wrought-iron gates, we rolled through a corridor of large banyan and eucalyptus, then turned ninety degrees to the right. On our left were clean white buildings, which

served as the living quarters of the ashramites. Several hundred feet further we passed the Master's house, enclosed by a low-walled garden hedged by blooming roses and bougainvillea. I had heard of his fondness for roses. His mother's name was Gulab Devi, *Goddess of the Rose*.

'Master is resting and will see you later in the morning. He has just returned from his Bombay tour. Someone will call you,' Khukhu explained, with a proper British accent. After casting a wistful glance toward his door, I was escorted through another fragrant rose bower (Indian roses are incomparably fragrant) and on to my spartan room. Once inside, I became aware of tangible energies breathing through me.

At 8 A.M. I was startled from my otherworldly reverie by a knock on the door. 'Master will see you now,' called a voice from the other side. I was escorted to his residence, heart pounding wildly, fearful, like a sheep being led to sacrifice. The thought of meeting the Word incarnate was almost too much to bear. Will this be my beginning or my end? After removing shoes, I was led through a large screen-enclosed porch to a dimly lit parlor. We continued towards a bright doorway and through it to the durbar, or court, of this spiritual king—his modest bedroom study.

There before me was the Master. Although decades have passed, that first meeting, even the sound of the rustle of his clothes, remains forever imprinted in my heart and mind as though it had existed from the beginning of time. He sat cross-legged on a neat low bed, dressed simply in white cotton kameez shirt and baggy sylvar pants, white turban on his head like a careless crown, dark blue vest with not one, but five pens in the breast-pocket, brown hands resting in his lap.

He waved me into the room. 'Hello! Hello! Come in! Won't you sit here?' as he offered a Western chair. Instead I sat on my knees on the floor before him, wondering how all this could be happening. Taking my work-callused hands in his soft, strong, brown ones, Satguruji affectionately patted and stroked them. His silent gaze penetrated into the depths of my soul—uncritical, loving, accepting, human-near yet holy-far. Of itself, my head lowered and soon felt his hand atop it, full of the weight and light of the Father. *Merci, mon Dieu*, at last! My battered ship found its harbor, these eyes their cynosure. I confessed, 'I have been a terrible sinner!'

He answered in deep, rich tones, '**Master is for sinners!**'

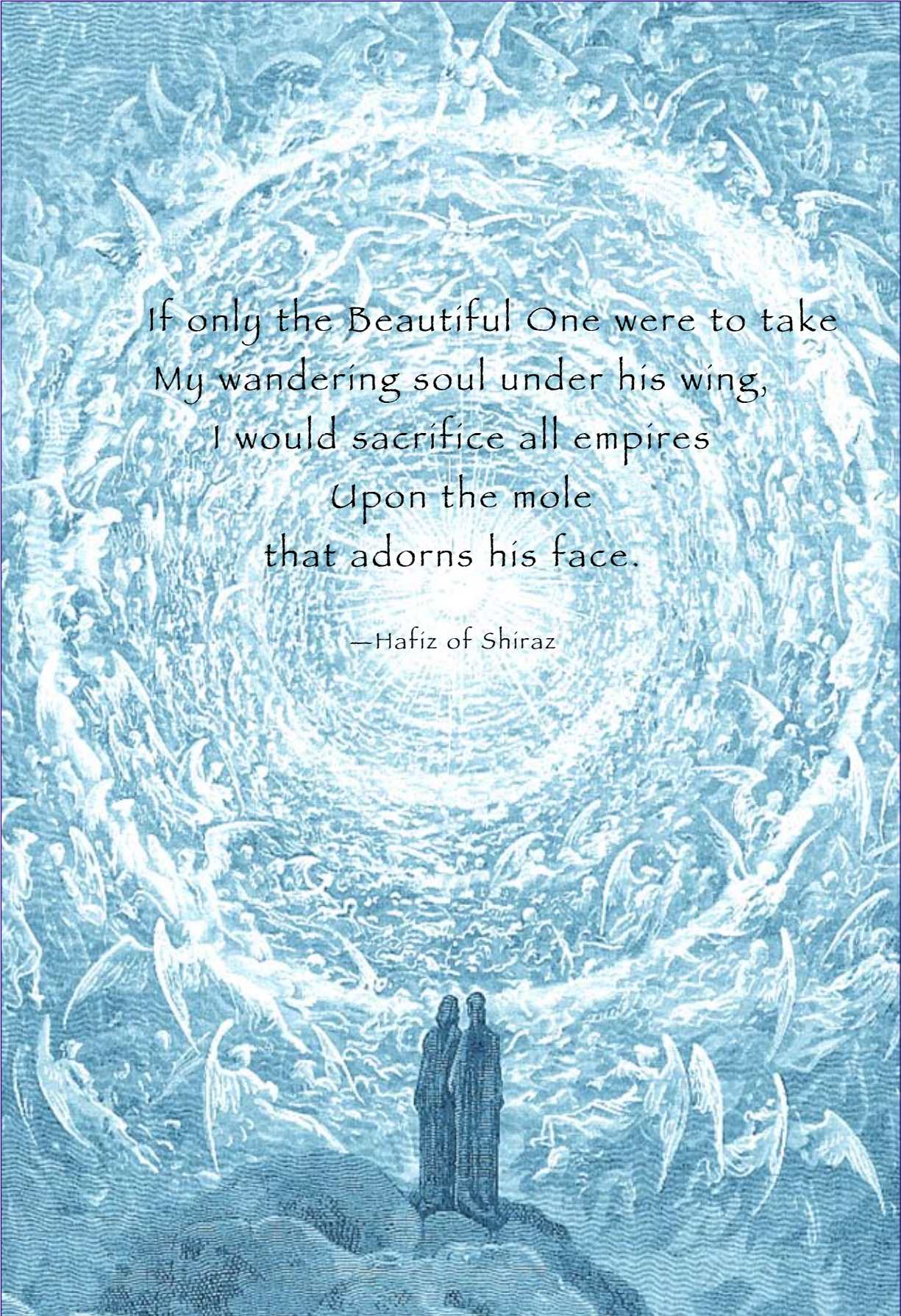
A long silence elapsed.

'I cut short my Bombay tour to be here when you arrived,' he said, breaking the hush.

Dumbstruck, I was incapable of responding. Why would someone as great as he, one whom countless thousands loved and revered as Master, do so much for such a poor, unlettered, and unproven youngster sitting dazed at his threshold? With the passing moments, such questions became subsumed, answered by love alone. And as he continued holding my hands, I observed up close his otherworldly mien—an essence that photograph, brush, chisel, words or notes could only hope to, but never fully capture, nor comprehend.

He smiled and beamed, eyes almost hidden in the folds but for the untrammelled light dancing in their liquid depths. His face, god-like in an Old Testament way, bespoke a universe of meaning beyond my knowing, each line and furrow and a thousand fine waves in his silver beard proclaiming a rugged, yet electric and resplendent perfection. *I was home with my Father.*





If only the Beautiful One were to take
My wandering soul under his wing,
I would sacrifice all empires
Upon the mole
that adorns his face.

—Hafiz of Shiraz