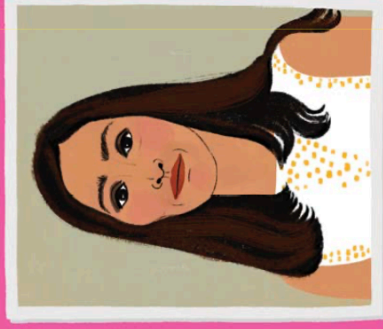


Jasbinder Bilan

I WAS BORN ON A FARM IN INDIA, close to the foothills of the Himalaya. As well as my family, I lived with a grumpy camel and a wild Indian monkey called Oma – who adopted us.

I was only one-and-a-half years old when my family moved away, but whenever we gathered for big family dinners, everyone told stories of our life in India. There were stories of our beloved Oma, and how she used to run off into the neem tree with my brother, sitting in the branches and rocking him to sleep. There were stories of the huge pans of popcorn that we used to cook on an outdoor fire under the starry skies. And there were stories of how, one day, we were going to have an adventure. We would travel back to India, hire a jeep and head off on a trip around the country, until finally we were on our farm again.

Writing this book about India has been like going on that journey: a sort of “welcome back”. I found out so many things about India that I never knew before, and I can’t wait to share them with you...



Nina Chakrabarti

I WAS BORN IN KOLKATA, one of the largest cities in India, to an English mother and a Bengali father. I loved growing up in such a huge place. The pavements were alive with bustling women wearing brightly coloured saris and men with neat, oiled hair and fantastic moustaches. The hum of cars, trams, buses and rickety rickshaws weaving their way around the city formed a soundtrack to my childhood.

Like Thara, I was very close to my Indian grandmother. Her name was Aparna, but my sister and I called her Dida and spent long afternoons plaiting and re-plaiting her hair. She’d bat us away when it was time to cook and I liked to watch her as she deftly added spices to a sizzling hot pan.

Years later when I moved to London, something about the city reminded me of Kolkata – perhaps because both cities are nestled into the mouths of majestic rivers, have inhabitants that speak many languages, and the higgledy-piggledy streets have a mix of old and new buildings. I felt at home immediately.



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