

CHAPTER NINE ASHA INDIA

When Asha heard an Animal Shelter had opened in Chandigarh, she asked her parents if she could volunteer after school. She loved walking the dogs, helping in any way she could.

One day, an elderly man came in hoping to adopt a dog. He said he was lonely. He chose a cocker spaniel. Sabal, who ran the Shelter, offered to bring the dog to the man's house, along with a bed, some toys and a week's supply of food.

As Sabal carried the shaking cocker spaniel, Asha helped with the bed, food, and toys. When she stepped into the house, everything seemed oddly familiar, the furniture, the pictures on the walls, even the family photographs.

Two months ago, Asha's best friend's family had been on vacation when their house was robbed. The elderly man was a thief, using everything he had stolen to create a false family. Things are not always as they seem.

Meeting her father at the British Library after school, she hoped they'd go to her favorite place, the Rose Garden. Thirty acres of beauty. Waiting at the front desk, she saw something on the wall she'd never noticed before. "The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them but to be indifferent to them. That's the essence of inhumanity." George Bernard Shaw.

It was late afternoon. As Asha and her father turned a corner in the Rose Garden, a baby Cape Lion blocked their path. He walked to Asha, putting his paws on her shoulders. "We need your help. Remember 2-4-1-9-9-8-8-1-5-2-0-0-0."

The headlines:

YELLOWLEGS ALTER AMERICA'S CUP FINISH
MADRID LIGHT FESTIVAL CALLED OFF
BEETLES DISABLE ROCKET LAUNCH SITE

It was April.

Asha loved Chandigarh. She couldn't imagine living anywhere else. Her father, an environment engineer, started taking her to the Rock Garden when she was a tiny girl. That the amazing art works had been created from urban and industrial waste was just one reason the Garden had become world famous. The sculptures, maze, pools, outdoor theater, animals, temples, palaces, and waterfalls made everyone, adult and child alike, feel they were walking into a fairy tale. Asha's favorites were the giant topiaries, in the shape of a sitting dog, chimpanzee, giraffe and a gorilla. Remembering the Admiral's suggestion to explore the indigenous people where she lived, Asha decided, instead, to study the indigenous plants and trees of Chandigarh, especially those with medicinal value. The Rock Garden was a never ending source of information.

During the summer, Asha always had a special project. This year, she decided to learn everything she could about the five elements: earth, fire, sky, water and air.

One afternoon, walking home from the movies with her friends, they passed a familiar building. Asha - "There weren't any windows there before. "Her friend, "Come on, Asha, no one could do that so fast." Asha - "The second story windows weren't there when we walked by a few hours ago. Asha's ability to notice details never ceased to astound everyone who knew her.

One night, overhearing her parents talking about a "placebo effect," she asked what it was. As her father explained every detail, Asha was fascinated. "You never know when a placebo can come in handy, especially when someone is very afraid and you don't have everything you need for an emergency. Telling someone you have something that will help them often does just that. A placebo works because someone believes it will."