

## CHAPTER SEVEN ASHA INDIA

There was to be a trail. Asha would defend the human race.

The more she had learned during her time in Prague, the more Asha believed humans often made life more difficult than it is. Rather than connect with one another, cultures seemed to do exactly the opposite. She did not agree that faster is always better. She had endless questions for her grandfather. He shook his head and smiled. "Getting lost is part of growing up,"

Arriving home in Chandigarh, she found a package waiting. Knowing that certain plants and leaves could heal the physical body, Asha had always been interested in nature. Neil had sent her a book listing all the essences, which oil/plant to use as a remedy for certain circumstances. She first tried it with the animals at the shelter and it seemed to be working. Aspen helped with fear of the unknown, holly with abandonment or abuse, walnut for a changing environment, star of Bethlehem with physical or emotional trauma.

The animals had asked Asha to remember a series of numbers. Marcus the Labrador had told her their significance had to do with the security of the Czech Republic. Her memory had allowed her to speak with the head of the country.

Asha knew her father had begun to plan for her wedding. All her friends agreed that their parents would choose their marriage partner. She loved her father dearly, but didn't know how she could spend the rest of her life with someone she didn't truly love. She promised to keep an open mind. Over the course of the next few months, meeting one young man after another, Asha said "No thank you."

Her grandfather told her a story about three soldiers who had been prisoners of war. Kept in the same small cell, the men had nothing to do each day and decided to talk about food: a special dish, a favorite flavor, dessert, cheese, cookie, ice cream. When the slop they were fed once a day was pushed under the door, they ate it as if it were the meal they'd discussed that day, chatting together while eating. "These are the best barbecue ribs I've ever tasted." "I've had lots of lobster, but this is, without a doubt, the most delicious." "Wait until you taste this onion soup." "This lemon meringue pie should win a prize!" They did this each and every day, describing in detail the subtleties of the seasoning and spices, the color of the fruits, the crispness of the vegetables. When they were released, all three men heard the same thing from their doctors. Having used their minds to *outsmart* the situation, they had minimal adverse physical affects, did not suffer the same malnutrition as did the other prisoners.

Asha thought she'd give it a try. On days when she was upset (one reason or another) when anyone asked "How are you?" her answer would be the same. "Never better." Was it possible that, each time she said it, her mind would hear and it would become true? Never better!

Asha loved learning. As a teacher, her mother agreed with Marcus' advice. "Don't judge different cultures, understand them. Never forget how much you don't know." Today she'd learned the difference between Vastu and Feng Shui. So much to learn. When her parents first told her about a placebo, she'd been fascinated. Walking home from school, she decided to write a paper about the nocebo effect. If she was to defend the human race, deciding what she felt was most important to change wasn't easy. Seeing a crowd in the distance, her curiosity was peaked. It was a peaceful demonstration to bring attention to violence against women in India.

Though the police were there to keep order, things quickly turned to chaos, cars set on fire and overturned. Three men ran toward her, pushing her violently to the ground before jumping into a car that sped away. When her parents arrived at the hospital, she was asleep. Her mother prayed quietly, Asha's favorite incense burning at her bedside table.

Waking up, Asha was smiling. “I was floating, but it wasn’t me the person, it was all of us together, Shilli, Emilie, Julian, Samuel, Lapis, Marcus and Snug. We were all the same, more like a cloud than humans and animals. Shadowless light. I never felt this before, belonging to everything and everyone, colors I’d never seen. I wish I could describe it better. Past, present and future all happening at once. It’s really hard to explain. Suddenly, everything started to pull apart. I didn’t want to leave.”

The police came to the hospital to speak with Asha, asking if she’d noticed anything. She told them she’d seen three men in a black car. When she described each man and the car in amazingly precise detail, the police were astonished. Asha’s father explained. “She remembers things.”

Attitudes toward women in India, the safety and equality of women and girls, sex trafficking, would be the changes she would champion. Now she had to decide the best way to begin.