

The festivities for Asha's wedding in Candigarh, India, were rich in traditions and symbolism. The ring ceremony had taken place several months before. As the priest said prayers, the groom's parents placed Misri, rock sugar, in the couple's hands. A sweet life ahead.

Jaimala. The exchanging of garlands, a commitment to respect one another.
Mehndi. The day before the ceremony was a females only gathering. Elaborate patterns were drawn on the brides' hands and feet with the freshly ground leaves of the henna plant, the bride and groom's names hidden in the deep red designs.

Sangeet. The grand party on the final night, a feast with music and dancing. For Shilli, Julian, Irina and Nicholas, it was their first chance to spend time with Asha and meet her soon to be husband, Rukmini Asim. Rukmini worked with The Animal Welfare Board of India. Few people knew that India was the first government in the world to establish such an organization.

Shilli - "Where did you two meet?" "Rukmini - "At an animal shelter. We knew immediately." Julian - "Love at first sight?" Rukmini - "Asha told me about a conversation she'd had one day with her grandfather when she was little. Arriving home from school, the first thing Daa daa jee asked was "What did you learn today?" "Our Constitution says every citizen should treat animals with kindness." "Yes, It was definitely love at first sight!"

Asha's father, Manu, an environmental engineer, spent most of the evening talking with Shilli, Julian and Nicholas. The possibility of a communication channel with animals, cetaceans, birds and others in the natural world was enthusiastically, and politely, discussed and debated.

Asha and Irina had catching up to do - girl talk. Irina begin by explaining how she'd told Nicholas, exactly what she wanted for a wedding gift. His immediate reply - "We'll go to both Borneo and Tanzania!" Nothing would be right until she knew Ayres and Victoria were settled and thriving. The visits were a success. The recognition was instant, the joy of seeing one another again meant everything. Ayres and Victoria were happy. They were home.

Asha wanted to have the wedding ceremony in her garden, but it was far from presentable. Another lesson from her grandfather. “Sometimes, the answer, the thing you are looking for, is right in front of you. You may already have everything you need. Because it’s always been there, you don’t notice it.” Everyone pitched in to help, digging up all the plants, thinning and separating, turning the soil, then replanting and watering. Everything needed was already there. The final result rivaled the work of any professional landscape designer.

Under a four pillared canopy of vibrant reds, oranges and golds, Asha and Rukmini Asim said their vows.

The Reception was held in the Zakir Rose Garden, Asha’s favorite place in Chandigarh. It was here three years earlier that she had been approached by a baby Cape Lion blocking her path. Putting his paws on her shoulders, his communication was clear. “Asim means protector. We need your help.”

Forty foot tall jacaranda trees, their blue purple lavender bell shaped blossoms both on branches and carpeting the ground, joined the towering Magnolia trees, the unique sweet smell of their fragrant blossoms, to complete the fairy tale setting. Giant topiaries, giraffes, rabbits and stags, elephants, eagles and bears encircled the reception area. It was impossible not to be enthralled by the unique living sculptures.

A Peacock, the national bird of India, his iridescent green blue plumage in full display, approached each person, bowed, (without his normal hoot dash) and continued on his way to greet the next guest. As the reception was coming to an end, a white crow appeared. Hearing the loud “Caw, Caw, Caw,” everyone watched as hundreds of ravens and swallowtail butterflies circled seven times. It was clear, on this day in July, that something unusual was happening in the Rose Garden.

Shilli, Julian, Irina and Nicholas stayed up half the night talking. Shilli was first with news - "I turned down the scholarship to medical school." Julian - "Lapis wrote me he did exactly the same thing. Shilli, are you sure?" "Yes, I want to concentrate on interspecies communication." Nicholas - "Did you all get the letter from the attorneys?" Shilli - "Yes." Julian - "I wrote Mrs. Green, asking if it was okay to bring Silas. She said it was fine." Irina - "Prague seems lifetimes ago. We'll all be together again." Nicholas - "A few changes, two married couples and a baby."

Asha had received the letter from the lawyers, Jane Green, Paul Osprey, Raoul Lapin and Rene Hibou.

"Go ahead and make your plans.
Decide what you are going to do with your life but,
as you do, remember that there are people, places and things
that are, at the moment that you are reading these words,
on their way to you, to change your life in ways you cannot imagine.
We invite you to spend a week with us in Bhutan,"

Because Rukmini would be at a conference in Switzerland the week of September 28th, she would be making the trip alone. The night the letter arrived, Asha dreamed she was floating in a sea of blue poppies, feeling happiness she'd never before known.