

## THE WEDDING

*By Donna Bishop*

A tribe of indigenous people were known in all of India for their ability to breed peacocks in any brilliant, iridescent color. The successful breeding process was a well-kept secret known to only a few trusted elders. The birds and their feathers were prized as pets and for decorating clothing, thus the peacocks were a valuable commodity at market. Many tribe members had died protecting the breeding secret.

A stranger rode into the village bringing five mysterious animals he called Manipuri horses. The stranger taught the Chief's beautiful daughter to ride. One day while out riding, they disappeared. The tribe searched in vain for the two riders, fearing for their safety and never suspecting a kidnapping since the stranger's gear and other horses remained in the village. A message finally came: "Your daughter will be returned in exchange for the breeding process."

The elders met to decide the fate of the tribe which was dependent on the peacocks for survival. Was there a possibility they could trick the stranger as he had tricked them? Plans were made. The Chief challenged the stranger to a wedding race. If the stranger won the horse race he would get the breeding secret as well as the daughter's hand in marriage. The stranger knew he could not lose the race. After all, the chief did not even know how to ride a horse. Elaborate plans for the race and the wedding were undertaken. The elders went about their preparations while the Chief tried to master the art of horseback riding.

The time for the race came with the stranger ready at the starting point. The tribe and the daughter anxiously awaited their Chief. He suddenly appeared on the back of a gorgeous creature that was both horse and bird. The head, legs, and front half were all horse except the horse's neck was covered with the most iridescent blue feathers and its head sported a crown of short feathers in blues and whites. The remainder of the animal was pure peacock with brilliant blue-green feathers fanning out like a throne behind the proud Chief as he took his place at the start line.

The race was on. The stranger, being the more experienced rider, immediately took the lead. The peacock lowered his feather into a graceful tail flowing behind the horse then he spread two strong wings lifting the creature into flight. The magnificent steed's endurance combined with the peacock's speed brought the Chief victory. With the race won and the daughter safe the wedding plans turned into a day of celebration. Perhaps just a bit too much celebration because the stranger slipped away with all the horses never to be seen again.