

## First Monsoon Rain in Meherazad 1974

This morning while sitting at my dining room table with a steaming mug of chai in my hand, I watched the Blue Jays come eat the peanuts I put out for them on top of the big cage where my parrots, Goher and Ghane live on my upper deck overlooking the hillside. The parrots are generous by nature and share nuts and berries from their food cup. The blue jays are very clever and have figured out how to weasel their beaks into the food dish inside! It makes me smile. Two jays return every spring and I like to believe they are the same two birds!!

I have named them Biku and Biki after the two blue jays we used to feed at Meherazad. I loved it when Mehera would take me out to the back verandah with pieces of chapatti or bhakri—or a handful of peanuts from the field—and we would hold our hands skyward, calling out, “Biki! Biku! Eeder own!” (“Come here!” in Gujarati) Hearing Mehera’s call, they would fly down to be hand fed. They would buzz us and grab our offering while flying back up, in one fell swoop, to the tree branch to feast. Sometimes they would land on our hand and eat from our fingers. “Hold perfectly still, mara bacha. (my child/daughter in Gujarati) Let’s see if they land on our hand again!” Mehera whispered. We got such a thrill when this happened.

One day at summer’s end—probably in 1974—just before the monsoon rains arrived around the 10<sup>th</sup> of June to break the heat ~ the sky turned a menacing dark gray. Patches of the sky overhead were a deep charcoal color as if someone had emptied an ashbin from above and it had collected on the floor of the heavens. The summer heat was unbearable this year—it had been stifling. These gathering clouds offered hope that relief was nigh! Meherazad was noticeably quiet this day because the intensity of the heat drained everyone’s energy. Mehera and I were sitting on the veranda having our tea and I was reading one of the Jeeves books to her. As the sky darkened, I paused reading, marking the page in the book with my finger. We looked up at the gathering storm.

Suddenly, the winds picked up and the sky was moving and swirling in a frantic, chaotic dance. It was all extremely exciting to watch the swirling skirts of these gypsy cloud-dancers. Then a big clack of thunder shook the ground and Mehera and I put our teacups down. I placed the book on the table, and we stood up and walked to the veranda edge, staring heavenward in amazement. Pregnant black clouds struggled in hard labor, blotting out the sun and were ready to burst. We could feel the birthing pains as the clouds danced across the sky like traveling gypsies. The clouds contracted inward and burst forth in agonized ecstasy. As sunshine dissipated, the atmospheric pressure changed; our ears popped, and the air became so heavy with moisture that our skin glistened.

The clouds were dark and foreboding—their shock framed by streaks of lightening crisscrossing the sky. Each light show was followed by drumbeats of

thunder. The air was thick and heavy, and within minutes, the turbulent, threatening winds began to pluck clothing and towels off the drying line—we stared in amazement as they were carried up and away, out of the compound. Wicker baskets fluttered around like leaves and the metal watering cans tumbled across the garden like tap dancers exiting stage right. The dry red earth rose upward, casting a pink glow into the air. Lightning broke through the darkened sky and thunder kept shattering the quietude, alerting us the storm was about to break! Dew gathered on our foreheads and trickled down from behind our earlobes, gently sliding down our necks. The wind whistled through the trees at a high pitch; the bougainvillea was pulled away from Mandali Halls' back door, captured by a blustery gust!

Suddenly, in the ominous darkness of a gathering monsoon storm, we were startled to see a white object streak across the garden from the Seclusion Hill side of Meherazad. Tossing around violently in a rolling motion, it crashed into the tree at the end of the oval flower garden area by Mandali Hall! Pinned into the branches of the tree about 6 feet above the ground, this white object, still unknown to Mehera and me, seemed to struggle to free itself before going completely limp. In unison, we both moved to the steps and Mehera said, "We have to go help it! Poor thing!" She grabbed my hand and said, "Come on mara bacha! I can't reach it! You've got to untangle it from the branches."

Just as we stepped off the veranda and our feet touched the ground, the wind reached a fevered pitch. Thunder and lightning exploded in crescendo! We had only moved a few feet from the steps edge when the sky opened; rain poured down as if all the waterfalls in the Himalayas had been redirected to Baba's Home in Meherazad! I have never been so drenched by rain in my life! Heaven had opened her holy dam and water poured down so intensely it was hard to not choke on the splashing water as it hit our faces. We had to look down to breathe and not suck up water! We were momentarily dazed at the deluge—rain was coming down in torrents.

Mehera caught hold of my arm and started to laugh; I joined in the enjoyment of the absurdity of the moment. We looked like two otters! Drenched, our hair was weighed down by the rain, plastered to our faces. We were completely soaked as if a submersion-baptism had occurred—our clothing wrapped tightly around our bodies, clinging to our skin. Rainwater pounding onto the ground covered us in red mud up to our knees! With no umbrella we stood, holding hands, relishing a wonderful moment of His baptismal fountain overflowing with rain, showering us. We were two schoolgirls caught in a downpour on their way home from a visit to the sweet shop! Mehera said, "We have to go help that animal that was blown into the tree!" So, arm-in-arm to steady our walk and not slip in the thickening mud, we carefully walked to the tree with quickened steps.

The white bundle was just above my eye level, dazed, motionless except for a few feathers being lifted by the wind. We could not tell if it had been knocked

unconscious or was dead from the trauma of being hurled into the tree. Mehera put her hands up on my shoulders to steady me as I reached up to gather the white bundle, both of us repeating Baba's Name. As I held the bird in my hands, it was obvious it was startled, rattled by the collision, and was struggling to stay alive after such a violent crash into the tree.

Mehera guided me to gently blow air in its beak and to lightly press on its chest to stimulate its circulation. The bird started to move a bit. We made our way back to the house as I held the bird in both arms, clasping it to my chest. Mehera walked behind me, and with her hands on my hips, she steadied us as we made our way through the downpour in the sloshing mud. Reaching the veranda, we gently placed the bird on the landing at the bottom of the steps that lead to the upper floor of the house. Mehera went to find Goher and Meheru to help while I was gently massaging the bird's chest and giving it small amounts of air. In between breathing into the bird's lungs, I called out to Baba to help us. Mehera came back with a towel and we rubbed the bird ever so gently to dry it off a bit and to stimulate its circulation. The bird was stunned, cold and shaken. When Meheru and Goher came we moved aside to allow them both to tend to the bird while we watched.

Shortly, Mani and Arnavaz arrived with towels and wiped Mehera and me down a bit. Both were perplexed that we were laughing at what was going on. Mehera sat on the landing, raised her feet from the verandah and said, "Look at my new slippers!" We did—heir deep maroon color was now brick red, caked in mud. Then she pointed to my feet and burst out into more laughter, announcing, "And look at this child!" pointing to my feet. "One of her chappals is out in the mud somewhere!" I had not even noticed that one of my sandals was out in the pounding rain, buried in rivulets of red mud swirling in the garden somewhere. It was all so funny to both of us; we were in the mood for laughter because I had been reading one of the Jeeves books to Mehera, and this all seemed like a scene out of one of those sidesplitting stories Baba enjoyed so much!

Since Meheru had taken the bird and was tending to it with Goher, Mehera and I got up and went to the foot of the stairs of the verandah at the garden's edge. We decided to stand in the warm rain to wash the mud off us before we went through the house. We might have been too late with the rainwater shower because I saw that when Mehera had gone in search of Mani, Goher, and Meheru, she left a nice muddy trail from the entry door of the house all the way through the main room and into the dining room—both to and fro! But there we stood, playmates enjoying the warmth of the rain while Mom was not looking! We were being drenched, joyfully, in the first monsoon storm of the season. Laughing, arms outstretched, we were two children marveling in the mess of it all! Mehera reached up and tried to move some hair out of my face, to no avail, pounding rain won the moment. It was all too glorious! It felt so good to be soaked to the bone after such a blistering summer.

Once we had quickly changed into clean, dry clothing, we came back to the veranda where everyone was gathered. Meheru had gently straightened the feathers of the still-stunned bird and Goher had worked her magic. At this point some beautiful feathers were standing tall on the head of the bird and they seemed to have beads at the ends; I remember the color as being purplish. Mehera thought it might be a white Bird of Paradise. It did not have the neck of an egret or look like the birds at the lake at the entrance to Meherazad, either. It seemed to have been carried from afar on the stormy winds and dropped into the gardens of His Home—into the lap of His Dearest Mehera!

Suddenly the bird perked up, dried and warm. Naja and Rano had joined in the rescue by this time. The pounding rain was easing, and the winds had ceased howling. Mehera decided that once the sun peaked out, we could go out back to the end of the veranda and facing Seclusion Hill we would release the bird at the edge of the field. Such a mixture of excitement and tenderness, all happening at the same time for me.

I was 24 years old, in God's Home with the women, helping to save this befuddled bird in the pouring monsoon rain, and I had been covered in mud with Mehera. Twice we were soaked as the heavens let loose with torrential showers, once as we made our way to the tree, and again as we stood on the steps, to be cleansed of the splattered mud that had been painted on our legs and clothes. The laughter was sublime!

Everyone participated in the rescue. I watched as they treated the bird with such loving care and concern; His Presence was palpable. I thought of those early days at Meherabad up on the Hill where they tended to the animals and birds Baba had collected. I could sense the joy the Lord must have had as He watched these women rescue this beautiful white bird. I glanced over and envisioned Him sitting in Mehera's Chair, pleased as He watched this all unfold!

The world became still, and all was quiet as the rain stopped and the winds no longer howled as they both traveled toward Aurangabad. Clouds were lifting and the sun peeked out. Meheru held the swaddled bird as it began to get restless and more alert; Mehera said it was now time to release it back to the wild. We got up and Mehera led the way out back to the edge of the field that faces Seclusion Hill. Meheru followed holding the swaddled bird to her chest; then came Mani, Goher, Arnavaz, Rano, Naja and me as the caboose. Meheru gave the bird to Mehera who placed it on the ground and gently loosed the grip of the cloth that enveloped it. Mani stood near Mehera's side as the rest of us remained back about 15 feet. The bird sat quietly, tilting its head to the side to watch as Mehera slowly moved away from where it lay. It stared at us for about a half minute while we remained motionless.

In this tranquil moment, a gentle cooing sound surfaced from within the bird's throat as if to thank Mehera for helping it survive the storm. It began to rock back and forth in the swaddling cloth Mehera had loosened, moving about to release itself from

the binding. Once free, it sat quietly for a moment, craned its neck to find its bearings in this new surrounding to which the storm had delivered it. Seated in a regal pose, the bird fluffed up its feathers, taking in the sun that was beginning to lower in the sky. After a minute or so it stood and spread its wings, gently flapping them, as if checking to make sure all engines were ready for take-off. This magnificent bird moved a few steps toward the open field, flapped its wings again and took flight toward Seclusion Hill. It flew about 200 feet toward the Hill and then circled back to where we stood looking up into the sky, feeling such joy our friend was able to fly and return home. This beautiful, white bird had weathered the storm unharmed. It flew above us, circling around several times before flying off, to disappear over Seclusion Hill. We all shouted His Jai and clapped. It was such a happy moment!

Mehera was so happy. During dinner she recounted in detail how we made our way to the tree in the pouring rain, lightning cracking above us and thunder rolling across the heavens. She told how we returned with the bird, and how the mud covered us in splatters up our legs and on our clothes! By now we were all laughing. She kept telling Mani and Arnavaz what fun it was to stand in the monsoon rain, telling them how warm the water was, and how much fun it was to revel in the downpour with no umbrella.

The next morning at breakfast, Mehera again went into detail about the previous day's afternoon excitement. In the middle of her story telling Mehera began to laugh. "Oh, my!" she said, "we have to go search for your chappal after breakfast!" We all burst out laughing, remembering Mehera pointing to my bare, mud-caked foot! After breakfast we went out into the garden, and although it took a while to locate it, we did find it buried in the mud over under the tree that held the bird captive. "When it dries, we have to test the leather to make sure nothing is loose or damaged" she said. "You mustn't trip or fall because the leather tears or the sole splits open." She laced her arm into mine and we headed back to the house—me holding the muddy sandal outstretched in my hand.

Halfway back to the house Mehera said, "If you need new sandals, you can get a pair when you go to town this Friday with Goher." Chuckling she quipped, "I myself have to get another pair of slippers, so you might as well get new sandals if you need them!" With this we climbed the veranda stairs and went into the house to return to everyday activity. I headed out back to rinse my sandal and put it on the tin roof to dry in the sun. Oh my, what fun we had in the monsoon rain because that bird was driven by wind into the Meherazad Garden.