

The Cat and the Dove

By Nettie (Nan) Riedel van Raaphorst

This story probably took place about 1970. Nan wrote it down in approximately 1986.

When we lived in Downey, the neighbors back of us had a cat and a dove that both came to us. I didn't try to adopt them — in fact, I chased the cat continually, because I was feeding birds to which she was a threat. This is how it went.

One evening I was hanging clothes on the line when something soft brushed my ankles. Startled, I looked up and discovered the cat peering at me — by then, from the edge of the garage roof.

"You rascal!" I said to her. "You knew all the time that I like cats!" For of course I had recognized her sign of friendship, though it was unexpected because I had been protecting the birds from her.

So she knew me for a "cat person" and presently she came to ask if she could live with us. There was no doubt of what she wanted. Equally, there was no doubt that I must refuse. Besides the bird issue, John had never liked cats and would not want one in residence.

I explained to her that she was welcome to visit me when I was working in the front yard, but that the back yard was reserved for birds. She must have been smarter even than I knew — she went to Hildegard and Egon Strathmeier's, where she was accepted *carte blanche* with surprise and joy, but she did come to visit me, sometimes getting my "lap" as I knelt or squatted at flower beds.

I think her original people liked pets, but since they all worked or were away all day, the pets sought company.

Her sibling, the dove, came over, too, and I was excited to find this big, white symbol of peace eating the seed I put out. I didn't realize where he had come from, and I accepted him as "ours." He was so obviously a "peace dove" that I tried "Peace" for his name, but that didn't seem to fit, somehow. The German word for it — *Ruhe* — was somehow more appropriate — perhaps the sound matched his soft cooing — and Ruhe he became.

He was still completely free to come and go as he wanted, but he fed in the yard, and each evening before the light reached a certain low candle power that I came to recognize as bird curfew, he flew in and went to roost on the wire just above our patio door. He made a lovely

heart-warming ornament over our door, especially as he was there completely on his own accord.

Came a weekend when we were to go to Cupertino to get Ellen and Tim for a visit. We always left very early in the morning, but I did notice, the night before, that Ruhe had not come to roost. I had seen him walking around at the front of the yard during the day, which was a Friday, and as he was so tame he could be picked up, I thought some school child must have taken him home.

Since there was no sign of him in the morning before we left, I had to believe that was what had happened, and I could only hope that it was someone who would care for him well.

We made our trip to Cupertino and enjoyed our return trip with our grandchildren. We arrived home at the end of the day, and as we stood talking in the living room near the fireplace, Ellen jumped and exclaimed, pointing to the fireplace: "There's something in there!"

Grandpa quickly reached up into the fireplace chimney and brought out... Ruhe!

But not our beautiful, iridescent, mother-of-pearl white dove, but a big, black Ruhe!

"Water! Get water!" I said, and Ellen and Tim ran to the kitchen and were back in moments with a pan of water, into which the poor, parched bird thrust his head!

He must somehow have missed his goal and fallen down the chimney as he came to roost, possibly belated and unable to see clearly on Friday night, and all the time we were gone he would have been futilely beating his wings in the sooty chimney, unable to rise out of it. It was probably two days — I don't remember for sure.

We didn't try to use any harsh cleaner on our poor dirty bird, but just let him keep bathing and preening until he was his gleaming self again. I think it took most of the summer.

Poor dear Ruhe!