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**Connecting**
Cathryn Ramin

When the nesting instinct paves the way for a new life

I **N A NOOK** under the roof that shelters our front patio, we have a repeat houseguest. If I knew what she liked, I'd bring her breakfast in bed.

Two years ago, almost to the day, I came out to Los Angeles to visit Ron for the first time. We'd known each other for just a couple of weeks, but we were sure it was serious.

He picked me up at the airport and I was quaking. On the drive to his house, neither of us said much. We didn't know where to start.

He took my suitcase out of the car and ushered me up the walk. Casually, he pointed up into the eaves. There's my bird, he said. I glanced up. A small tan bird with a bright blue ring around her eye sat in a nest less than a foot from my head. My breath could have ruffled her feathers, but nothing moved. A dove, I thought. What a lovely example of the woodcarver's art.

BUT WASN'T IT a little precious for a 33-year-old bachelor to locate a carved bird in the eaves next to his front door?

I didn't consider the dove for the next 24 hours. After breakfast, I walked outside into the unfamiliar California sunshine, and glanced into the eaves. She was facing the other direction.

I stared hard this time. She didn't quiver. Her breast didn't flutter. She didn't blink. I called inside: When did you turn the bird around? I asked. Was this evidence of some weird habit?

Ron came out, looking confused. I didn't turn her around, he said. She's been there for about a week, sitting on her nest.

I thought he was teasing. I was truly uncertain. And then I was abashed. I, who had joined serious birdwatching expeditions, had made a perfect fool of myself. I thought it was carved, I mumbled. To his credit, Ron only smiled.

The next morning, he went outside to get the newspaper, then dashed back in. Get out here he said. You won't believe it. Two baby birds, with enormous beaks and oily, flattened feathers, were shuffling around the nest.

RON AND I spent much of the week standing on two chairs, observing. Our bird didn't seem to mind. Her babies grew up fast, moving from infancy to proud, fluffy birdhood in five short days. They started to strut, to flap their tiny wings.

I think they're going to leave the nest, I told Ron. We worried about this. Perhaps they would crash onto the tiled floor below. If the initial launch was not perfect, there would be no second chances. We went to the garage for some old carpet remnants and unfurled them on the patio.

Satisfied with the softness of the landing pad, we went out for the day. When we returned, the nest was empty.

We held hands and stood on the patio for a while. We'd been through something together.

A week had passed, and it was time for me to leave. We had made some decisions. I would move to Los Angeles in the fall. We would see if our romance was a keeper.

A year later, after our wedding, I looked for the bird, but she did not come. I assumed that the presence of a rambunctious dog and a large cat, both brought from the East, had made our patio less than desirable. I supposed that she would never visit us again.

I opened the door one morning a few weeks ago, and there they were, our dove and her mate, in the eaves, chattering about real estate. I ran to get Ron. I liked this sense of continuity, of renewal.

A week later, a day before our first anniversary, a nest appeared, as if by magic, and our dove sat patiently.

The dog barked at the mailman, and the cat watched from the window, but the bird never moved. I walked out the door a dozen times a day, sometimes offering her my best regards, but usually forgetting that she was there.

Next week, I imagine, we'll see two oily heads with open beaks. And once again, we'll get out the carpet. ■

Cathryn Ramin's column appears on Mondays and Thursdays.