

Rays From The Rose Cross Magazine

The Cord and the Nest by Dagmar Frahme

"Whatever is that?" Mrs. Cedar-Waxwing raised her head from the straw that she was trying to arrange in the side of her new nest, and looked at her husband quizzically.

"Fnuf nung gnunk," came the reply.

"Don't talk with your mouth full, dear. You know I can't understand you." Mrs. Cedar-Waxwing leaned against the side of the nest, glad of a chance to rest.

Mr. Cedar-Waxwing put down the piece of heavy, brown cord he was carrying, and opened and closed his beak several times. "Ugh, that fluff came off all over my mouth," he said. "That," he continued, pointing to the cord, "is a piece of Mrs. Barber's mop."

"Oh, Henry, you know I don't like dirty things in the nest. Certainly a piece of mop can't be sanitary!" Mrs. Cedar-Waxwing frowned at her husband, who smiled tolerantly at her.

"Well, this piece is. It came from a mop that had just been washed and was hanging on the clothesline."

"Oh." Mrs. Cedar-Waxwing regarded the cord with more interest. "It certainly is sturdy and thick. Wish we had more pieces like that."

"We will," said her husband. "The mop is still on the clothesline and I intend to get lots more out of it before Mrs. Barber takes it in."

Mrs. Cedar-Waxwing looked at the cord longingly, and then down at the clothesline where she could see the mop hanging. "Do you really think you should, dear?" she asked finally. "I mean - of course, I want more of it, but Mrs. Barber is pretty nice to us birds, and it just doesn't seem fair to ruin her mop."

"It won't be ruined," Mr. Cedar-Waxwing assured her. "That mop is so thick she'll probably be glad to have part of it pulled out."

"All right, if you're sure - wait, I'll go with you," as Mr. Cedar-Waxwing started to fly off. "We might as

well get all we can before she takes the mop in."

The CW's (which is what their friends called them and I guess we can call them from now on, too) hurried down to the mop and each began to tug away at a piece of cord.

"Goodness," said Mrs. CW after a minute, "it's not as easy as I thought. You can sure feel your neck muscles doing this. "

"Ummmm, " agreed Mr. CW, continuing to pull. "Oooooof," he said suddenly, falling backwards as the cord gave way and spreading his wings to catch himself. "There, it's out. Here, dear, you're not doing it right. Take this and I'll show you."

Mrs. CW took the cord from her husband's beak, and watched as he pulled on the one she had been trying to yank out.

"See," he said, "you've got to brace yourself with your feet this way and then you can pull better. "

He tugged hard a few times, and out came the cord. Mrs. CW watched him admiringly. "My, you're strong," she said.

The CW's flew off with the cords, inserted them into their nest, and flew back for more. They had gone back and forth several times, and the mop was starting to look rather scraggly, when Mrs. Barber happened to look out of her kitchen window.

"James, come here, " she called to Mr. Barber, who was on a ladder hanging a picture.

"In a minute, " he called back, "when I finish this."

"No, dear, come now - it's important."

Grumbling, Mr. Barber put down the picture, climbed down the ladder, and came into the kitchen.

"Well?" he asked.

"You must take a look at those birds on the clothesline. Aren't they clever?" enthused Mrs. Barber.

"Birds! " exclaimed Mr. Barber crossly. "You mean you dragged me down that ladder just to watch a bunch of - well, for pete's sake! "

Mr. Barber looked out just as Mr. CW managed to pull free a particularly thick piece of cord, causing the mop to rock back and forth on the clothesline. He stared in amazement.

"If that doesn't beat all," he said. "I didn't know birds had that much sense."

"Of course they have sense, dear," said his wife. "I've been telling you that all along. Remember the blue jay who pulled the lace out of your canvas shoe that was drying outside?"

"Your mop is going to be ruined, though - it's just about ruined already," said Mr. Barber.

"Oh, I don't mind. I can always get a new one."

"Um," said Mr. Barber. He wondered how much mops cost, but decided there was really not much point in asking, and went back to his ladder.

Mrs. Barber watched the birds for a while, and thought they were starting to look tired. As, indeed, they were.

"Can't we rest for a bit, dear?" asked Mrs. CW. "My neck muscles hurt from pulling so hard, and I think my beak is getting sore, too. "

"Well," said Mr. CW, consulting the sun, "I suppose we could knock off for lunch. Let's take those worm sandwiches you made down to the willow tree by the

brook. I think we could use some shade and some water. Hope that mop is still here when we get back."

The CW's flew off, and Mrs. Barber was sorry to see them go. She had been enjoying their performance and was even thinking of calling her neighbor to tell her about it. Then she had an idea.

She went into her sewing room and opened a box of string and yarn. She took out several long pieces of heavy yarn, cut them up into shorter pieces, and carried them outside. One by one, she put several of them over her clothesline, and then back into the house as she heard her telephone ring. (She knew Mr. Barber wouldn't want to come down from the ladder again to answer it.)

All was quiet in the yard for a while, and then the CW's came back, Mr. CW eager to get at the mop again, but Mrs. CW not particularly happy about the prospect of more pulling and tugging. She landed on the clothesline not too near the mop, arched her neck a few times and rubbed the muscles with her wing.

"I'm going to have to put some liniment on my neck tonight or I won't be able to move at all tomorrow," she moaned.

"Why don't you get some twigs then, dear, instead of doing this?" suggested Mr. CW. "I can get all the rest of the cord that - will you look at that! "

Mrs. CW followed his gaze to the far end of the clothesline, and for the first time noticed the pieces of cord hung over it. "Those look just like the cords from the mop," she said, surprised. "You don't suppose Mrs. Barber put them out for us, do you?"

"Maybe," mused Mr. CW, stroking his beak with his claw. "And maybe she did it to keep us off the mop. In any case, let's grab them while the grabbing is good!"

Mrs. CW forgot all about her aching muscles, snatched up the first piece of cord and flew off with it, followed closely by her husband. They put the new cords in place in the wall of the nest, and stepped back to admire their work.

"This is already the sturdiest nest in the neighborhood," said Mr. CW with pride.

"And the best looking," beamed Mrs. CW. "Look how that cord sets off the green of the pine needles-and I especially like the cord design on the floor. Wait till that uppity Mrs. Mockingbird sees this - she won't be so ready to brag about her architect any more. "

As the CW's flew back for more cord, they stopped short when they saw Mrs. Barber come out of her house. "Better stay here in the bushes till we see what she's up to," muttered Mr. CW. "We can't really grab that cord out from under nose. She likes birds, but I don't know if she'd put up with that-particularly if the cord isn't for us after all."

"But what else could it be for, dear?" inquired Mrs. C.W. "People don't just hang pieces of dry cord on clotheslines for themselves."

"People do lots of crazy things," retorted Mr. CW, "and I want to be sure before getting any closer."

They watched as Mrs. Barber began to hang more pieces of cord on the clothesline, stopping now and then to scan the sky.

Finally Mrs. CW said, "Dear, I'm positive that cord is for us. She even seems to be watching for us to come back. I'm going down and get another piece." And off she flew.

"Brenda, come ba-" began Mr. CW, but his wife was already gone, and there was nothing for him to do but follow very dubiously.

Mrs. CW circled right over Mrs. Barber's head a few times, and Mrs. Barber looked up, smiling delightedly. Mrs. CW pounced on a piece of cord, yanked it off the line, and circled over Mrs. Barber's head again several times, hoping Mrs. Barber would understand that she was trying to say "thank you." Then she glided triumphantly past Mr. CW who was hovering nearby, grinned at him as best she could with her beak full, said "See?" and flew home.

Ms. CW watched the process in some amazement. His wife usually wasn't that brazen - it must be the fact that she suddenly had the most elegant home in the neighborhood that was making her so cocky. Finally he dived down after his own cord and zoomed home, not bothering to say "thank you. "

The CW's flew back and forth for more cord, and soon they were grabbing it off the clothesline faster than Mrs. Barber could put it out. Then suddenly - carried away and obviously forgetting himself in his enthusiasm - Mr. CW dived low and snatched a piece of cord right out of Mrs. Barber's hand. Mrs. Barber was delighted, but Mrs. CW chirped angrily, scolding her husband.

"Have you no manners at all, Henry? People don't grab things out of each others hands - and don't tell me

we're not people," as Mr. CW started to say something. "That makes no difference. You haven't tried to thank Mrs. Barber once, and she's going to think you're some kind of barbarian!"

Mr. CW flew off, shrugging his shoulders. "Humph," he thought, "if it's manners my very elegant wife suddenly wants, she'll see what manners I've got!"

He flew home quickly, inserted the cord rather hastily in the nest, and flew to a large tree between Mrs. Barber's house and the clothesline, preening himself for a few minutes .

"Now what's he up to?" wondered Mrs. CW as she hurried back and forth getting more cord. "Oh well, he's worked pretty hard today. If he wants to fool around for a while, I guess it's all right. I can finish this."

Suddenly she stopped in mid- flight as she heard Mr. CW begin to sing." My goodness," she said after listening a few minutes. "I've never heard him sing like that."

Mr. CW was indeed singing as he had never sung before - high notes and low notes, trills and chirps, and even one or two chords, which was very hard to do. He sang one song after another - sad ones, happy ones,

and even a song that he had once composed in music school and that Mrs. CW had never heard before.

She listened delightedly. "Why that dear bird. He is thanking Mrs. Barber after all, and much better than I ever could."

She turned to watch Mrs. Barber and smiled at the look on Mrs. Barber's face. Mrs. Barber had turned toward Mr. CW and was staring at him in amazement. She knew quite a bit about birds and had watched and listened to them almost all her life, but had never heard a bird sing like this. It was simply beautiful.

Suddenly she felt a hand on her shoulder and turned to see Mr. Barber who, even inside the house, had finally heard Mr. CW and had come out to look.

"Magnificent," he whispered, and she smiled. She had a feeling that from now on Mr. Barber might even be persuaded to go on a few bird-watching walks with her - something he had always scoffed at before.

The Barbers listened until Mr. CW was finished and then, arm-in-arm, walked back to their house.

Mrs. CW, who had been listening too, flew over to her husband.

"That was beautiful, Henry," she whispered. "You sounded almost like a nightingale."

"Well, now-" said Mr. CW modestly, but feeling quite proud of himself and very happy, "it really wasn't so much. I guess it was the least we could do to thank Mrs. Barber. After all, we don't want her to think we are barbarians, do we?"

"You silly bird," said Mrs. CW fondly, and together they flew home to enjoy their first night in their elegant new nest.

The Grumpus Rumpus

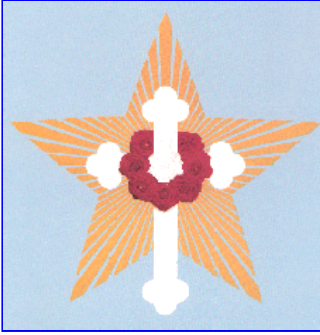
There once was a wumpus
Who was called Mr. Grumpus,
On whose face a smile once never shone.
Till one day he did find
A cute "she" of his kind,
And now he feels not so alone.

—*Rays from the Rose Cross Magazine, January, 1980, p. 45-48*

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