

A Sufi Dove



by Guido Mina di Sospiro

It's official: it has been the warmest July on record in Italy, and here in Todi—nestled along the Tiber Valley, in Umbria, and equidistant from the Adriatic and Tyrrhenian Sea—it has been particularly torrid. Las Vegas, Nevada and Moab, Utah, were consistently slightly less warm, which seems hard to believe, but I checked all along. Mercifully, a swimming pool has been the perfect place to cool off.

One remarkable thing happens there, usually at dusk: swallows swoop down, barely touch the water, enough to drink a tiny sip, and then, without stopping, fly up and away. They're such masters of trajectory control, they avoid us by inches. And yet yesterday something more remarkable yet happened.

A largish white dove flew down to visit us, late in the afternoon. She landed on the pool's edge and, unconcerned by our presence, began to march around the pool. She did it once, twice, thrice: her marching was turning into a marathon. She would look at us, at the water in the pool, would seem on the verge of diving in, but then she would get back up on the *travertino* ledge, and march on.

She must have escaped from some cage, we thought, as pigeons are a delicacy on the menu in many restaurants in the area and therefore, we supposed, she would ironically be not be afraid of humans, whom she probably sees as her assiduous feeder until one day such a human will wring her neck. Not only was she unafraid of us; if anything, she seemed to *want* something from us. But of course: water. She was thirsty but, not being an aquatic bird, the pool must have looked like a lake to her, and a danger. So I stepped out of the pool, turned on a hose and filled the shower's basin with water (the basin doesn't drain well, which is just what was needed). I went back into the pool as the dove calmly walked over to the shower and drank. After that, she hung around for quite a while, and then flew away.

Today my wife and I were bathing, again late in the afternoon, enjoying the coolness of the water and the sounds of nature, except for the clatter of the occasional cicada. And there she was again, flying from we don't know where to an umbrella pine close by and then down to the ground, yards away from us. This time, we decided, we would spare her her marathon, and I immediately filled the shower's basin with water. The dove did *not* walk around the pool, but went straight to the basin, and drank. Then she walked up the nearby outdoors stairway, only five steps up, so that she could have us in her sight. And there she sat, for a couple of hours, preening her plumage, and just looking peaceful and pleased to be in our presence. Eventually, she flew away.

If no hawk or sundry bird of prey will kill her, we have a feeling we shall have a companion for weeks to come. Clever, beautiful, classy thing. I should have thought of homing pigeons, and the still largely unexplained marvels they are able to accomplish in postal carriage and communications during wartime. Unlike the locals and many a tourist, I have never eaten a pigeon, and most certainly never will.