

The Pink House

by Grace Ferguson

It was labeled “the odd one,” the residence ignorant passersby derided for its color. Pink. *Were its dwellers gay? Or, childish women refusing to mature?* The unpopular house located at the intersection of Bayer Avenue and McIntyre Street had grown accustomed to the stereotypes, and each one simply evoked a knowing smile.

Mr. and Mrs. Roper, its original owners, had it built twenty years ago. Both never cared much about others’ opinions, so when Mrs. Roper suggested they paint the house in pink, her husband easily agreed. Sadly, Mr. Roper died of natural causes a year ago, and Mrs. Roper followed two months after.

The pink house was up for sale, and Brad and Ana Commons were actively looking to escape their apartment abode. Married for two years, they were ready to purchase a home.

Early one Saturday morning, Brad and Ana went house hunting in a neighboring city. They embarked upon the corner of Bayer Avenue and McIntyre Street. The two-story house, softly painted in a light pink color, caught Ana’s eye.

“Honey, stop the car!” she said to her husband.

Brad glanced in bewilderment at his wife.

Ana pointed to the house on the right. “Over there.”

Brad slowed the vehicle to a halt, alongside the curb protecting the lush green lawn.

“That?” he pointed to the house Ana stared at.

“Yes, honey. Let’s look into that one.”

“You’re kidding me, right?”

“No, I’m not. What’s wrong with it? It seems like just the right size for us.”

“Yes, but it’s...pink!”

“So what? I like it, Brad. It’s...different.”

Brad snorted. “Yeah, it’s different, alright. Come on, Ana. How do you think this is going to make me look? I’m the one that has to go to work every day. I’m the one who’s trying to become a Finance Manager instead of remaining a Senior Accountant. How’s this gonna make me look if I ever invite my boss over for dinner? How about if I want my friends to come over and watch the game?”

Brad sounded almost hysterical, deflating Ana’s enthusiasm.

Wanting to please his wife, Brad said, “Okay, we’ll check it out.” Still, he had to find a way out of this potential embarrassment! “But if we decide to buy it, can we change the color right after?”

Giddy with joy, Ana flung her arms around Brad. “Let’s cross that bridge when we get there, okay?”

Reluctantly, Brad nodded.

Thirty days later, the house belonged to Brad and Ana. Content with being a homemaker, Ana decorated the interior of their new home with zeal. However, each time Brad pulled into the driveway of his pink home, he grimaced. He needed Ana to agree to change the color, soon! Their parents had visited, and the initial smirk his father-in-law tried to mask from the driveway did not go unnoticed by Brad. But once their parents entered the house, their demeanors changed. Inside, the aura was so serene, that when it was time for them to leave, they secretly wanted to stay. The house affected them in a strange manner. Not even in their own home had they ever experienced such a calming effect.

Still, a dilemma plagued Brad and Ana. They wanted a child, and Ana couldn't conceive. They'd been trying unsuccessfully ever since getting married. After many doctor visits, there were no medical explanations for Ana's infertility. Brad tried to reassure his wife that it didn't matter whether they had kids, but covertly it did. Ana suggested adoption, but Brad wanted his own child. Additionally, just last week he'd suggested that they change the house's ghastly pink color, but Ana refused.

They'd been living there for three months, but Brad's pride would not let him invite his friends over. Ana longed to hear the patter of tiny feet running around the house, and she began to privately blame Brad for its absence. Over the last four weeks, a noticeable gap formed between the couple, as resentments brewed.

One evening after dinner, they retired to the living room to watch a movie. Ana noticed her husband's aloofness.

"Brad?" she said, sitting beside him on the sofa.

"Hmm?" Brad said, keeping his eyes on the tube.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong. Why do you think something's up?"

Ana sighed. "Because we're not speaking. You've been very distant lately, and so have I. Can we talk about it?"

"There's nothing to talk about."

Ana reached for the remote and switched off the television.

"What the hell did you do that for?" Brad snapped.

"Cause it's the only way to get your attention."

"Okay, you've got it. Now what?"

Disheartened, Ana said, “Brad, I know this thing with the baby is starting to become a problem...”

“I said I was fine with it!” Brad interrupted.

“Stop lying to me, Brad. I know because it bothers me too. But like the doctor said, we could adopt.”

“I don’t want that,” Brad said. “I don’t trust it. What if the kid turns out to be some weirdo or freak? I’m not going there, Ana.”

“A weirdo? Oh, so that’s it. You’re scared everything won’t be perfect. But there’s still no guarantee even if we have our own child, Brad.”

“I know that. But I’d rather take my chances with my own than someone else’s. Who knows what kind of genes were passed down to the kid, anyway.”

Ana’s patience broke. “You’re so freaking selfish! All you think about is yourself!”

She stormed to the bedroom and slammed the door shut. Brad followed her and flung the door open.

“I’m selfish?” he asked. “Well, tell me this then... Why are we even in this place to begin with?”

At Ana’s silence, “Let me enlighten you, baby. How many husbands do you know who would stay in a damned pink house just because it’s what his wife wants? How many? I’m in this place because of you, yet I’m selfish?”

Tears pooled in Ana’s eyes. “So you hate me for being here? I’ve tried to make you happy.”

Brad’s heart softened. He approached his wife and hugged her. “Baby, listen, this is hard for both of us. I love my life with you, but I hate this house. There’s something about it. It’s

just...creepy. Maybe this is why we can't even have a kid. Maybe this place is jinxed. Maybe if we lived someplace else, you'd be pregnant by now. Let's move, baby. I know we just bought it, but let's go someplace else that feels...normal."

Ana pulled away from Brad. "Me not getting pregnant has nothing to do with this house. I think you know that. Plus I don't want to move, and I don't want to change the color either. The color is what makes it so special. And unlike you, I don't care what people think. Did you see how our parents were after they came inside? They didn't want to go home, Brad. There's something magical about this place. I can feel it."

"Magical?" Brad scoffed. "What's magical about a place that makes you the butt of everyone's jokes? You're the only one who's happy here."

"And you're the only one who refuses to adopt a baby!" Ana cried. "I want a baby, Brad, and if the only way to do it is through adoption, I say we do it."

"And I've told you, I'm not doing that!" Fuming, Brad strode from the room.

That night, Brad slept on the couch, and Ana, in their bed. In the morning, Ana did not awake to make Brad's breakfast, and Brad left for work without speaking to his wife.

Over the next two weeks, the couple barely spoke to each other. Frustrated, Ana confronted her husband in the dining room one evening.

"I think we should separate," she declared.

Brad was eating take-out Chinese, since Ana had refused to cook. Dumbfounded by her announcement, he swallowed the noodles with a gigantic gulp.

"Yes, separate," Ana said at his disbelieving expression. "I'll go stay with my parents for a while. I'm also going take a course, maybe online, so I can start earning some decent money. I can't live like this anymore, Brad."

Slightly recovered, Brad said, “So, you want a divorce then?”

“No, that’s not what I’m saying. I just think we need to be apart, so we can figure out what we really want.”

“But if we’re not living together then we’re not together anymore. What’s left to do but file for divorce? I’m not stupid, Ana. That’s usually the next step. Let’s slow down for a minute here. You’re not making any sense.”

Stunned, Brad couldn’t believe his wife was leaving him! “Baby, listen,” he pleaded. “We can work this out. We could try counseling.”

“Work what out?” Ana said. “Counseling? For what? For some head quack to take our money, and hide the truth from us? We’re both unhappy, Brad. I can’t have the baby you want so much, and you don’t want to be in this house. Even if we change the color or move, I’d hate you for it, and if we adopt a baby, you won’t want it. Let’s just spare ourselves the heartache. Maybe we’re not meant to be together. Maybe we’re both too selfish to even be married.”

Ana began to pack her suitcase and bags, while Brad watched her silently, his soul burning from loss already. As Ana drove away, he watched her from their bedroom window until she disappeared. Before leaving for work the next day, Brad glanced around the living room of the house that he blamed for his and Ana’s division. He despised the house. Everything had been terrific between him and Ana until they bought it. How could things have deteriorated so quickly? The house was cursed. He would put it up for sale soon.

Ana had been at her parents’ home for two weeks. She thought of Brad constantly, but felt their marriage was over. The chasm between them was too wide, especially when it came to children. Also, Brad was a good-looking man, and she wouldn’t be surprised if he already found someone new. The thought jabbed needles into Ana’s heart.

Though she missed Brad dearly, Ana also longed for their pink home. Still, she couldn't help but view the house critically. Was Brad right? Was their home responsible for their demise? Did evil embody its seemingly placid walls?

Brad questioned his decisions, as well. He yearned for the bond he'd shared with Ana before they moved into their new home. The house was now on the market, but he wondered if maybe he'd made a mistake by doggedly clinging to his pride? Another week passed, and the couple remained in stagnation.

One afternoon, as Brad ate lunch at a local diner, his cell phone rang. He answered.

"Mr. Commons?" a woman inquired.

"Yes? Who's this?"

"This is Miss Dixon. I'm calling about the house you've got up for sale."

"Oh yeah, yeah. Hi."

"Yes, hi. When can I see it?"

"When would you like to?"

"This Saturday around noon if that's okay with you. Are you the owner?"

"Yes, and this Saturday at noon's good."

"Okay, see you then."

On Saturday, Brad showed the elderly Miss Dixon around the house. She was enamored with it, and he wasn't about to tell her that the darned thing was the worst thing that ever happened to him. Before leaving, Miss Dixon promised Brad she would call him the following week to begin the sale. And it was time for Brad to make *the* call.

He called Ana's cell, but it went straight to voicemail. Rejection swarmed Brad, as he figured Ana had turned off her phone to avoid him. Determined to speak with her, he tried her parent's home phone. Mrs. Palmer, Ana's mother, answered.

"Hello Mrs. Palmer, it's Brad."

"Oh, hi Brad!" Mrs. Palmer smiled.

"Umm, is Ana there?"

"Yes, yes, but she's not feeling well."

Brad grew concerned. "What's wrong with her?"

"We don't know," Mrs. Palmer said. "She's been to the doctor, and they think it might just be a cold. You know it's going around. Anyway, they did all sorts of tests, and everything came back fine. Even her pregnancy test came back negative. If you ask me, I think she's just lovesick. She hasn't said so, but I know she misses you, Brad."

Brad liked Mrs. Palmer, but he wasn't comfortable discussing his marital woes with his mother-in-law.

"Can I speak to her?" he asked.

"Sure, hang on."

Mrs. Palmer went to her daughter's bedroom. "Brad's on the phone for you," she said to Ana.

From the bed, Ana groaned, and hauled a pillow over her head. "I don't want to talk to him, Mom. Tell him I'm sleeping."

Ana was not yet ready to deal with Brad, which was why she'd switched off her cell. She'd decided that in exactly one week, when feeling stronger, she would inform him that she was ready to file the divorce papers.

“Talk to him, honey,” Mrs. Palmer said. “He knows you’re awake.”

“Mom!” Exasperated, Ana picked up the phone on the nightstand, and Mrs. Palmer left with an impish grin.

“Hello,” Ana said in a feeble voice.

“Ana? What’s wrong?” Brad asked.

“I’m a little under the weather, but I’ll be fine in a couple of days.”

“You sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure. What do you want?”

Brad hesitated. This woman sounded nothing like the alluring female he’d married. Had her love for him flown already?

“Well,” he said. “I wanted you to know that I found a buyer for the house. Can we get together soon so we can make sure we agree on everything about the sale?”

An ominous silence dripped through the line, as bitterness gripped Ana. “Oh, you’re selling the house? Well, congratulations! And guess what? I’d like a...” The phone line beeped.

“Hold on.” Ana clicked over. “Hello?”

“Hi, Ana Commons please,” a female voice said.

“Speaking, who’s this?”

“This is Sharon, from Dr. Friedman’s office. How are you?”

Ana wished she would get to the point. “I’m fine. What is it?”

“There’s been a development in your tests. We can’t explain it, but as you know, the first ones came back negative. As a precautionary measure, we decided to retest, and now one of the tests is positive.”

“What are you talking about?” Ana asked, seething. If Brad had given her some kind of venereal disease, she would have him murdered.

“You’re pregnant, Mrs. Commons.”

Ana could have sworn her heart ceased beating. “What?”

“That’s right, you’re pregnant?”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, we’re certain. We retested three times. We’re not sure what happened the first time, but it was negative. For some reason, it’s now positive, and we don’t see it changing. Again, we can’t explain it, but rest assured you’re pregnant. You can get a second opinion if you’d like, but we also want you to come in soon.”

Ana’s disbelief faded, and rapture took over. She was pregnant. Suddenly, she remembered that Brad was holding.

“Okay,” she said. “I’ll call you soon.”

Ana needed a moment before clicking over to Brad. How could this have happened? Was there a logical explanation?

“Brad?” she said quietly.

“I’m still here,” he said, wondering who the hell she’d been talking to on the other line. Did his precious Ana have a new man already?

“I’m pregnant, Brad.”

Brad was transported to another planet, where after shock dissipated, questions ruled. Pregnant? How was that possible? Ana had been gone for three weeks. Was he the reason she couldn’t conceive? Was she carrying another man’s child?

“It’s yours, Brad,” Ana confirmed. “That was the doctor’s office. The first test came back negative, but they retested, and now it’s positive. They’re not sure what happened the first time, but they’re certain I’m pregnant.”

Both grew quiet, ensconced in mystification.

“So you got a buyer for the house, huh?” Ana said.

“Yeah,” Brad replied, not knowing what else to say. However, Ana did.

“Brad, you probably think this is just a coincidence. But I know this miracle growing inside of me has something to do with our house. Why would it happen the minute you called me to tell me you’ve got a buyer and I was about to bring up divorce?”

“You were gonna divorce me?” The thought crushed Brad.

“Yes, I didn’t see any other way out for us. But now I’m saying that the house has something to do with me being pregnant.”

“You’re saying it’s haunted?”

“No, not haunted. It’s our gift, Brad, and we can’t sell it.”

“But that house broke us up, Ana!”

“I’m pregnant, Brad, just the way you want it.”

Brad was ecstatic about the baby. He also couldn’t ignore Ana’s insight. Despite his opposition to their home, he’d always sensed a buried power emanating from its walls.

“Will you come home, Ana?” Brad asked. “I’ll cancel the sale.”

Brad and Ana were finally tranquil. As their miracle blossomed within Ana, the home Brad had viewed with hostility only drew them closer. He abandoned his fear of what outsiders thought and embraced the mysterious home. And they would never change its color.