

An Angel Of A Man

By Kimberly Halcomb

Sheryl Anderson would sit for hours just staring at it. Sometimes until she was cross eyed and sometimes until her face would color.

"Why is your face so pink?" Kyle would ask.

"Pink?" she'd glare at him between clenched teeth. "It ain't pink, Kyle. If anything it's red!"

She didn't want it to be pink and if Kyle wasn't there, she would have cried. She didn't even know why she hated it so much. After all, what did it ever do to her? Except be there day in and day out when she didn't want it. Tall, underdressed windows jeering down at her every time she left the bus stop. Mocking her in the twilight, waiting for Hattie to come home.

Hattie! Maybe that's why she hated it. "Ain't ever gonna be nuthin', Sherry Anderson. Ain't ever gonna be nuthin' except you." Hattie's fist would come down hard on the table. Sheryl hated that table cluttered with old smelly newspapers and empty beer bottles.

"But, I am gonna be something. I am! I'm gonna leave this small, river town. Gonna buy me a

nice house somewhere. Gonna...”

“Gonna, gonna, gonna.” Hattie’s words would slur and Sherry would cringe. “That’s all I hear. Well, sometimes gonna ain’t good enough. Sometimes, you just have to live with what you got. I do.”

But, Sherry wouldn’t. She just wouldn’t. Besides, what did Hattie have to live for anyway? Nothing! Nothing but a sad, dilapidated, pink house. An ugly pink house on an ugly hill that probably wouldn’t be there if it wasn’t for Sherry.

“She only puts up with us for the money, you know.” she whispered to Kyle one day after Hattie fell over in a drunken stupor.

“Money?” Kyle’s big brown eyes stared up at her brainless. “What money?”

“You know. The money from the government.””

“No.“ Kyle shook his head.

“Oh, never mind, Kyle.” It was exasperating. Kyle never could see anything looking him straight in the face. But, it was the money. Sherry knew it and it didn’t take a very smart girl to figure it out either.

People used to tell her she looked like Hattie. Hah! Go figure! If they ever knew! But, eventually they would, because Sherry would tell them. She couldn’t enter into a conversation without it coming up and when it did, she made a very big point of it.

“So, you’re Sherry Anderson,”” they’d say.

“Hattie’s daughter. You live in that small pink house on the hill.”

“No.” she’d lie. “Ain’t ever lived in that house.” and “Hattie who?”” She’d try to smile to fool them.

“Oh, come on.” they’d laugh. “We know you live there.”

“Okay! But, how’d you like to live in it? And, don’t ever call Hattie my ma either! She’s not my ma! Ain’t fit to be anyone’s ma! Just leave me out of it. All of it!” She’d have to catch herself though because ““all of it” meant Kyle and Kyle wasn’t so bad.

“It’s so sad, Shey.” Kyle said once. He’d been talking to the neighborhood’s stray cats. They’d come picking through the trash cans. Why? Well, Sherry didn’t know, because what was in them? Nothing. Nothing. She watched Kyle nuzzle one lovingly before putting it gently aside. Then with a frown said, ““No one wants ‘em, do they?”

“No.” she agreed. “No one wants ‘em.” and then Sherry felt like crying. Should she tell him she wasn’t talking about the cats? Would it make her feel better? No!

The day she wore that ugly, pink sweater in the third grade was the day she really began hating the house. She didn’t even recognize the resemblance until everyone pointed it out to her. “Look! A pink twinkie sweater for a pink twinkie house!”

A twinkie? Her sweater wasn't a twinkie! In fact, if you turned the gold buttons just so to the light, it sort of sparkled like a sunset. Yeah. A pink, flowering sunset just waiting to burst. Not a twinkie! She showed them.

"Don't see it." one said real bold like, poking another with his elbow.

"Nope. Don't see it." the other shook his head.

"Are you sure?" Sherry's eyes stung with tears. "Because, if I turn it this way where more sun can pound down on it, maybe..." she turned, but the sun didn't catch it. Neither did they.

A girl in pigtails looked at her curiously. She was one of those girls that didn't have any friends either. One of those always trying to make Sherry her friend.

"Are you sure you just don't want it to look like a sunset?" she said real gently. Her freckled face turned away anxiously

That's when Sherry lost it. Don't anyone ever pacify Sherry! No! Sherry knew what it looked like. She was the one that lived in it. That small, pink box of a place where the back porch didn't even have windows. It used to. But, not anymore. And, a twinkie? How can a pink box look like a twinkie? A twinkie wasn't pink. It was gold. She did the only thing she could do. Go crazy! She knew it the minute one of the teachers came running out of the school building to hold down her arms

and legs from kicking them all in the face. After that, she was the crazy Sherry that lived in that small pink house on the hill.

When she calmed down, she reasoned it. Although she still couldn't reason the teasing. It wasn't her fault she lived there. If it was her choice, she wouldn't live there at all. If it was her choice she wouldn't even live in Wycliffe. That seedy, little spot by the river where everyone knew everyone else and where you couldn't even walk down the street without someone recognizing you. Where you couldn't say one little mite of a thing without it blowing up in your face.

She used to love the town and the river and the boats. "Where do you live?" they'd ask when she'd cross the river into Barlow.

"Wycliffe." She'd reply all proud like. Because, living in Wycliffe meant you lived right on the river. That tiny sea full of opportunity with its big river boat, the first in the county. The dozen or so fishing resorts. The small dining houses just a few feet from the currents. And, the large boats and barges rolling their wealth back and forth from sunset to sundown. But, after the Twinkie thing, she began hating it too.

But, she wasn't so hard nose that she didn't reason it. After all, the pigtailed girl said the house looked like a twinkie. Maybe it did. A twinkie did have a lot of white creamy puff in the middle.

Her pink sweater had puff in the middle.

A twinkie was all billowy.

Her pink sweater was billowy.

A twinkie did sort of sparkle like a sunset.

The gold buttons on her sweater sparkled.

But, where did that leave the house? It wasn't billowy. It didn't sparkle. It wasn't soft and good and sweet tasting and lovely to behold. No! It was just plain and ugly and pink with no good on the inside or out. So, how could she reason the house? She couldn't!

But, the day she really began hating it was the day Kyle came. Yeah! Because that was the day she really felt someone would share her pain. But, he didn't.

They were sitting on a fallen tree limb at dusk, right before the sun set. Hattie, hadn't come home yet and just the thought of being locked out again with the darkness and the house once again jeering at her, made the hate inside her thicker. But, she began thinking, maybe, just maybe when the clouds separated, that small, pink house on the hill wouldn't look so ugly. Maybe it would look like a twinkie or maybe a sunset or anything but what it really was.

It seemed hours just waiting and staring at it that she finally asked him. "Do you think it's a Twinkie house?" His eyes got real big and wide in almost wonder.

"A Twinkie house?"

"Yeah, you know. Like those snacks. Those Twinkies."

“Yeah.”

“Yeah?” Sherry looked at him bewildered.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.” He nodded.

“You really think so?” She studied the house trying to envision a Twinkie but saw nothing. Nothing but that ugly pink thing that in twilight looked even more ugly. “How?”

“How?”

“Yeah, how?”

“Dunno.” he shrugged.

A cold wind blew in wrapping around their shoulders, their faces watching solemnly as the darkness settled thick above the icy jigsaw of the Mississippi.

This was how they spent most of their nights, huddled together beneath the big oak or when the wind was too harsh, the sagging roof of the porch. Maybe that’s why she hated it. Because there was no comfort in the house or the yard or even the river, gruesomely dark and empty.

After that, she dropped it. She didn’t really see any sense arguing in the cold with a five year old. But she’d catch herself often trying to make that ugly pink house into a twinkie. Maybe if she imagined the shutters and trim white. Maybe that would do it.

No. Because it’d still be the same pink house with boards falling and windows cracked. Maybe if she spruced up the yard, bought some seed and

sprinkled it around like she'd seen Mrs. Riley the neighbor do. Maybe that'd do it.

No. Because there'd still be those ugly yellow invaders that no matter how many times she cut them down, they just grew back. But, maybe it wasn't even the house. Maybe it was the hill. Yeah. "cause it took forever to walk it.

Whatever it was that made it look like a Twinkie, Kyle knew. But, maybe he didn't really know at all. Maybe he was still too young to really see it. Sherry had been young once where that pink house on the hill never really bothered her. Where her feelings were still too fresh and new to let them grab her. But, that was a long time ago. Too long ago to remember.

When Sherry found out about the other money, she was stunned. So, stunned, she had to rest the twinkie thought, because it didn't seem right, the twinkie thought taking up space in her mind where something more pleasant should be.

Kyle had pulled his knees up to his chin thoughtfully and as they both once again stared at the house, they talked about it. "Well, what do you plan to do with it?" he asked.

"What?"

"The money."

"Oh." Sherry hadn't really thought about it.

"Will you move?"

Move? Yes! Sherry would move. "Yes!" her face had lit with anticipation. The thought of

leaving everything behind exhilarating. “Yes. I can move. I can buy me a nice house. I can...”

It only took a moment for Kyle to interrupt her. ““What did he look like?”

“Who?”

“The man with the money.”

“Oh.” Sherry thought about it. ““He was tall.” she nodded. She remembered him being tall. “He had light colored hair with a mustache curving up all friendly.” Or, at least she thought he had.

“He had sparkling blue eyes. An expensive blue suede suite that smelt of rich cologne. His face shone like the sun. He was an.... angel. Yes! Oh, yes, an angel!” Just the remembrance caused little goose bumps to spin down her spine.

“An angel?” Kyle had stared at her in awe, small lips puckering incredulously. “Did he say anything else? I mean, besides giving you money?”

Sherry really didn’t know and shaking her head, she said so. “No. At least I don’t think so. See, well, I didn’t hear much.” she admitted.

“Oh.“ He understood. “Hattie?”

Yes. Hattie! How Sherry loathed Hattie that day. More than ever. Did Hattie really think she had locked the door? Because, she hadn’t! And, when Sherry peeked through the small opening to the living room, Hattie was serving tea. Hattie never served tea! The man was looking around nervously and then after a moment of awkward silence, his voice so low Sherry could barely hear him, he asked,

“Is she home?”

“Home?” Hattie had laughed, walking to the windows, shutting the curtains. “Probably is.” she nodded. “ Out playing with one of her friends, I imagine.”

Liar! Sherry had thought. What friends? Hattie knew Sherry didn’t have any friends! Hattie was the reason Sherry didn’t have any friends. Sherry’s eyebrows had pinched together agitatedly as she watched the man look away disappointed, his fingers running over the worn back of the couch before settling beneath the folds of his blue suede suit. His eyes, the bluest and kindest eyes she had ever seen looking at Hattie suspiciously. “I just figured I might meet her, is all.” he said.

Hattie nodded. “Well she’ll more likely be coming in any minute.” and then Sherry had clenched her fists together at her side. She wanted to get her just then. Do something mean and ugly, for Hattie was lying again. Lying. She had locked the door. How could Sherry even get in when the door was locked?

It was then, it really dawned on her. Hattie locked the door because... No! She wouldn’t. She wouldn’t dare! Something awful had lurched in Sherry’s stomach that moment. Such a cruel, awful feeling, that when Hattie had finally spoken again, Sherry thought she would faint.

“So, when will she get it?”

“Get it?”

“The money.”

Pacing up and down the small living room, the man hesitated and Sherry couldn't help but think how beautiful he was. He was so beautiful that for a moment, Sherry almost forgot why she had been standing there until he spoke again and then she wished he hadn't. Wished more she hadn't tried to eavesdrop. Why give herself over to the biggest disappointment of her life?

“It's all ready for her.” he had finally said, looking around once more at the drab furnishings.

“So, when she turns eighteen, she can have it.”

Now, shaking, she leaned her head in her hands, the memory almost too great to bear. No. She didn't hear much.

A strong wind blew in, creaking the house and as Kyle scampered nearer, a ghostly fog swallowed the river. It'd be a long time before she'd get that money. A long time. But, when she did, she would leave. She would be somebody. And, then she knew what she'd have to do. Perhaps it was the way Kyle clung to her with a purpose or perhaps it was the way the house once more jeered at her. But, somehow, somehow she'd have to move out before her eighteenth birthday. That'd be the only way to get the money.

“But, what about me, Shey?” Kyle asked only when he was old enough to really understand. He

understood he'd be left alone with Hattie.

"I'll come back for you." she vowed, but she didn't.

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