

Thomas  
Hair Rollers and Plastic Pink Flamingoes

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### Hair Rollers and Plastic Pink Flamingoes

“Never go to the grocery store with rollers in your hair.” This was not the sort of advice that I was expecting from the dapper Dr. Earle Moore, the senior partner in the medical practice I was joining. He had stopped by to welcome us as we moved into our home on 24 South Main Street. The stately Victorian, built a few years after Orville and Wilbur took flight, was in Chase City, Virginia – the kind of town where older houses are named after the families that once lived in them. Ours was known as the Tisdale House, but I referred to it simply as Twenty-four. Standing in the side yard with one foot propped on the porch step, Earle continued his sage advice.

“And one other thing, don’t wear bedroom slippers to town,” he added. *A curler curfew? Would I get a slipper citation if apprehended feloniously footed?* It slowly occurred to me that the good doctor was genuinely concerned that I conduct myself in a manner befitting the expectations of this small, southern town. Nodding solemnly, I promised Earle that I would never stray beyond my front door flaunting the offending fashions. Satisfied that I would not make any permanent waves, Earle said goodbye and

Thomas  
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headed to his own venerable home. My husband, Bill, and I resumed unpacking, chuckling over Earle's peculiar counsel.

“Well,” I said to Bill, “at least he didn't say anything about plastic pink flamingoes.”

“That's probably because he doesn't know that we have any,” Bill replied, a mischievous gleam in his eye.

Our pastel flock made its debut a few weeks later, landing in the perennial flower bed in the front yard – the quaint garden built around the trunk-sized stone that had been used as a mounting block for the circuit riding minister who had once lived in Twenty-four. Flamingoes in the foxglove? We could almost hear the scandalized gasps from our neighbors.

“What was that?” Bill asked me.

“The wind, maybe? You know how these old houses are,” I replied, gazing out the window at the cheerful covey.

Still, I was one of the town's doctors and if I suffered from a minor lapse in taste, the citizens of Chase City allowed me the one idiosyncrasy. But Bill and I had only begun to ruffle the town's feathers.

When the infamous *Pinkus plasticus flamingus* turned forty, we decided to celebrate the birds' birthday. As a tribute to the neon icons, we hosted an outdoor pink tie soiree at Twenty-four. Pink attire was required – even the refreshments were pink. Forty fabulous flamingoes flooded the property. The backyard appeared to be awash in a sea of Pepto-Bismol. The town was getting nervous about its lady doctor.

Thomas  
Hair Rollers and Plastic Pink Flamingoes

In contrast, Earle, the town's beloved patriarch of medicine, unquestionably behaved in a manner befitting the Greek physician, Hippocrates. Chase City was honored when Dr. Moore was selected as one of the torch bearers to carry the Olympic flame through nearby South Hill, Virginia as it ceremoniously made its way to Atlanta. Upon hearing of his selection, the town bestowed upon my partner an increased reverence. I decided to give him a backyard toga party. It was more than our poor Victorian home could bear.

No doubt mortified at the unconventional activities, Twenty-four was beginning to show signs of strain – her pure white veneer was starting to crack. We were going to have to call in a professional. The snowy paint on the wooden siding was flaking off, forming drifts at the foundation. Three years after we had moved in, our home now looked as forlorn as a misshapen, muddy snowman during a warm spell in January. It was time to paint Twenty-four - time to give her a new, more exciting façade.

The Victorians may have lacked social spontaneity, but they loved colorful homes. However, the neighbors informed us that The Tisdale House had always been white with dark green trim. Dubious as to our intentions, Chase City watched us suspiciously as we took down the gutters and removed the shutters in preparation for the painters. While the crew began scraping the peeling paint, I envisioned the colors of a tropical garden blossoming on the clapboard siding. Mrs. Seriously Concerned from down the street anxiously asked me what color paint we were going to choose. As she peered over the top of her half-glasses at me, I told her that we hadn't yet decided. And three days later it began to rain nearly every day – for two months.

Thomas  
Hair Rollers and Plastic Pink Flamingoes

Amid the row of neat white and gray homes on South Main Street, our scraped and unadorned home looked like a plucked chicken drowning in a continual procession of gloomy, low pressure systems. As the weeks passed, the neighbors were beginning to brood. While in the office one day, Mrs. Concerned asked me, “Just how long are you going to leave your house looking that way?”

It became a question that Bill and I often heard. We decided that the neighbors were right – something had to be done. It was early December - time for color and festivities, for decorations and lights. But it was still raining. Even if it stopped, it would take weeks for the house to dry enough to paint. And then, like the Grinch, we had a wonderful idea. The flamingoes, all forty of them, would transform our blue Christmas into a plastic, pastel party.

On a cold Saturday morning, when all other tropical birds had flown to warmer climes, our flock landed in the front yard on South Main Street. A fuchsia tinsel boa harnessed nine flamingoes to a Radio Flyer wagon, a blinking red light adorning the lead bird’s beak. Decked out in a tasteful orange and blue Hawaiian shirt sat Santa Flamingo, complete with a bag of switches and a few lumps of coal.

A gauntlet of garland festooned flamingoes and overgrown candy canes led to the front porch that featured a glittering six-foot cardboard palm tree appearing to sprout from one of the columns. Reynolds Wrap covered the antique pine door and a lopsided grapevine wreath draped with pink crepe paper completed the entry. Ostentatious by day and spotlighted by night, it was a delightfully tacky scene that literally stopped traffic. Carloads of citizens drove by as if gawking at an accident.

Thomas  
Hair Rollers and Plastic Pink Flamingoes

An early season snowfall failed to accumulate enough to obscure the proclivity scene. Indeed, traffic increased to see the frosted flock. It was a cold weather circus, a frozen flight of fancy. It made the papers. Chase City longed for the end of the Christmas season.

Relieved when January arrived and the irreverent decorations took wing, the town came to appreciate Twenty-Four's scraped but unobtrusive façade. By April, several weeks without rain had prepared our home for a much needed face-lift.

Mrs. Concerned flew to our house the moment she saw the painter's van pull into the driveway on the Monday after Easter. Forgetting to take off my slippers, I intercepted her in the yard, anticipating the inevitable question.

"Dr. Thomas, please just tell me what color you're going to paint the house," she asked somewhat reluctantly, as if afraid of what ideas Bill and I had hatched.

"Well, Mrs. Concerned, I think that you'll be relieved, um, pleased to know that the shutters will be a soothing shade of teal green – sort of like the Caribbean Sea," I replied.

"And the walls..." she nervously squawked, looking at Twenty-Four as if it were about to fly south forever.

Glancing proudly at our beloved brood perched in the perennials, I turned, looked her in the eye and, nearly cackling, I said, "Why, pink of course."

It's a good thing I was a doctor, even if I was still wearing my slippers.

Thomas  
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