

# Rose

Mary Helen Ponce

**H**er name was Rose. Not Rosa, Rosie, nor Rosita, but like the flower by that name, said to have a scent all its own. Rose.

I first heard of Rose on the day of my confirmation rehearsal, when my godmother-to-be, Tiburcia, or Toby as she was called, did not show up at church, and I was forced to walk up the aisle alone, a thing that made me furious. Later that evening Toby came by our house to explain her absence. I refused to greet her, angry as I was, but heard Toby tell my mother she was detained while shopping for confirmation veils, velos, and because she stopped off to leave a veil for a girl named Rose, whom she was to sponsor at her confirmation. Rose it seems lived in San Fernando, and was about my age.

I was curious to learn more of this girl, this Rose. But I was also angry knowing I would share my godmother! It wasn't fair! Toby explained she had arranged for Rose to be confirmed with my class. Rose, it seems had missed her confirmation because of illness; this was her only opportunity to receive the sacrament. This explanation pacified me for a time, but I was still resentful of this person, this Rose.

I began to wonder if Rose was pretty, slim. I was quite chubby and although growing like a weed, hated my thick arms, round nalgas. I had no way of knowing what Rose looked like, nor was about to ask Toby to show me her picture. Secretly I hoped Rose was fat...and ugly.

Toby was my sister Elizabet's best friend. She was in and out of our house often, so that when it came time for me to select a confirmation madrina, I quickly pounced on her. ~

"Uuuuh Tiburcia. Toby, will you be my godmother. For confirmation?"

Toby said 'yes,' immediately, gave me a hearty squeeze, then announced she would gift me with a confirmation veil from J.C. Penny's, the best store in town. Upon hearing this I began to jump up and down.

Toby was most stylish. She dressed like the lawyer's secretary that she was, and on Sundays, wore white gloves and big picture hats to church. Better still, Toby was very popular, and had lots of boyfriends. I *have* collected the best madrina, I told myself. Surely Toby will buy me a confirmation veil that is unique, different,...expensive!

Later, when Toby once more spoke of Rose, I no longer felt angry, resentful. I was absorbed in trying to memorize Confirmation prayers, Latin responses, the correct way to kneel before a bishop, and experimenting with ways to straighten my curly hair.

The week before my confirmation was one of intense activity. I washed my hair at least four times, saturated each curl with wave set bought at the corner store, then rolled it in aluminum curlers borrowed from Concha, my best friend, who sneaked them from her sister Celia. I was taken to Penny's in nearby San Fernando to buy a white slip, white socks, and a white dotted-swiss dress (Size 12 Chubby).

The times I went to town were rare. Mostly I tagged along with my older sisters who hated taking me anywhere, and who, when their friends came by, thrust a dime into my hand then took off to window shop. But this time they were extra nice, and smiled while I tried on oxfords.

When finished shopping, I sauntered off towards Thrifty Drug Store to chat with Mabel, Elizabet's friend. Mabel worked in the soda fountain, and when the boss wasn't around, served her friends free cokes. Once at home I put my confirmation dress inside the bedroom closet then went to sleep.

The night before my confirmation, I scrubbed my knees extra hard with the pumice stone kept by the bathtub. I scrubbed until they bled; still they looked dark brown. I put vaseline on my eyebrows and eyelashes, praying they would grow overnight, then rubbed some on my red knees hoping this might bleach them.

I hardly slept that night. I lay awake thinking of the ceremony to come, of the bishop whom I would address as 'Excellency,' and of my dress, veil and new socks. Now and then I

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thought of Rose, the girl with whom I would share a godmother.

Confirmation day dawned bright and clear. The April sun was never so warm; the sky so blue. I dressed in a frenzy as the church bells tolled the hour. I tore off for church, white veil flying in the wind, eager to see my friends - and Toby.

We lined up for the ceremony. My knees ached from the scabs now forming. My head reeled from the tight curlers. My dress was too tight! When shopping I had lied to the salesclerk - and refused to try on a larger size (Size 14 Chubby). I held in my round stomach, then loosened the wide belt and pearl buttons near the waist. I so wanted to look like St. Teresa, the Little Flower. I felt pious, holy - and fat.

The dress sleeves that encircled my chubby arms cut into my flesh. The snowy lace on the sleeve edge, now stretched thin, no longer flounced. I was perspiring - as were the other girls, anxious for His Excellency's arrival, when I looked up to see Toby approaching. With her walked a tall, white-veiled girl.

Toby was dressed in a polka-dot dress with a short peplum. A cluster of red cherries was pinned to her shoulder; white gloves clung to her hands. On her shapely feet were black and white spectator pumps, then the current rage. She looked stunning. I felt proud to have her as my godmother and quickly put my hand through hers. It was then I remembered the girl that stood next to her. Rose.

Toby introduced us. Rose said 'hello' in a shy, soft voice then moved next to Toby. In that instant I realized how lovely Rose was. Her skin was a light almond; her cheeks a soft pink. Her light-brown eyes were the color of caramel candy; her pink mouth a moist rosebud. Her straight hair hung to her waist! I hated her!

What held my attention however, was Rose's confirmation veil. It was identical to mine! I stared at it looking for something that indicated mine was different, a ribbon or flower, but soon gave up. It appeared I wore an identical veil to that of another 'candidate for confirmation,' as the good sisters called us. I was furious. I knew I would cry! I wanted to snatch the veil off my head - and Rose's off hers. Just then the procession started.

When the organ began to peal Asperges Me, a hymn reserved for a bishop's visit, we quickly secured our veils, pulled up socks and

made sure our sponsor was nearby. The older girls dabbed on rouge hidden from the prying eyes of the catechists as we enviously watched. I stood my place, too angry to move, aware of the figure that moved next to me. It was her, that Rose.

She took her place beside me, then turned and smiled. I stood mersmerized, not knowing what to do. The look she gave me was one of love, affection. I felt my eyes smart with angry tears. I didn't want to like her! My hands itched to throw my prayer book and rosary beads at her. I stood, twisting my veil, trying to ignore the girl who smiled sweetly at me. Rose.

I felt awkward - my dress collar tight around the neck. Next to me stood the tall slim girl, her white dress skimming over her slender frame. Her dress, also of dotted-swiss had two rows of lace! Her socks had a lacy cuff. Her white patent leather shoes had a small heel! I stared down at my school oxfords, twitching my feet back and forth, then glared at Toby behind us.

I now hated her too. And her Rose. I was sorry I had begged her to be my madrina. I thought of tripping her, but changed my mind,...for every time I turned my eyes met those of Rose. Rose, not Rosa, Rosie or Rosita, but Rose. Eyes of caramel-brown, full of affection and good will. Eyes that bore neither envy or malice. Eyes that said I want to be your friend.

When finally the march began Rose turned to me; I reluctantly turned to her. She reached out, took my hand, and gently squeezed it. I squeezed back. She smiled at me; I grinned at her. Then hand in hand we walked up the church aisle as behind us, a triumphant Toby gleamed with pride.