

No amount of her Mama's crying was going to bleach her brain white. Just because Mama wanted to erase every trace of what she was, did not mean Rosa Jane wanted to.

Rosa Jane suspected it all had to do with Granddaddy Shawn, and his red hair. Mama had hair just like his, all curly and never wanting to lie down. Not that Mama ever complained about it. Along with her green eyes, it kept what Mama called 'the awful truth' hidden.

That is how Papa had been fooled into marrying Mama. They had run off together, and all went well until Granddaddy Shawn and Grandma Ponti showed up to see their first grandbaby, Roxanne. If Papa had been any other kind of man, he would have left Mama flat.

After Rosa Jane was born, Mama had gone to her parents, and asked them to take her. Suspecting the cause, Grandma Ponti asked her why. Mama gave all kinds of reasons, but never had the nerve to admit that she was ashamed to have a dark baby. Grandma Ponti had refused. 'A baby's place is with its Mother'. Mama cried and complained, but Grandma Ponti's mind was set.

Preacher Johnson and his wife, Eliza, were the first to visit Mama and the new baby. While friendly to her face, Eliza poured her pity out to her husband, and her venom to the church ladies' league. As a result, Mama received so many 'well-wishers' that Papa finally shut the door, and pretended they were not at home.

The next Sunday, every pew in the Antioch Baptist Church was crammed tight. People that had not been to church in ten years came to see Preacher Johnson baptize the first darkie to enter their sanctuary. When Papa and Mama arrived, the front row pew was waiting for them. Roxanne, their 'normal' girl, sat between them. A collective disappointment settled on the expectant congregation. Rosa Jane was nowhere in sight.

Time passed and it became clear that Mama was determined to scrub the darkness from her child. The truth was Rosa Jane did not belong. Her hair was black. Her eyes were black. Even in the dead of winter, her skin was dark. No matter what Mama did, Rosa Jane's black hair never curled the way she

wanted it to. She never had any freckles. Even her beloved Papa would often say how he was sure glad at least one of his children was normal.

Rosa Jane found her only happiness at Grandma Ponti's house. She ran barefoot, and whooped and hollered. What Rosa Jane loved most were Grandma Ponti's stories from when she was a girl: Running through the tall prairie grass, scraping the buffalo hides, sleeping in a teepee.

How could Mama be ashamed of that?