

Two of a Kind:



The Remnant

M.A. Laborde

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by

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Chapter 1

“Oh, my heavens!”

Wendella Scott was nearly speechless at the sight that greeted her as she stepped past the screen door and onto the front porch of her house in Glenport, California, to retrieve the Sunday newspaper.

At first Wendella saw only the angelic face with its trusting, bright eyes and eager smile. She released the screen door and stooped to interact more directly with the unknown infant who had been placed on the porch in a baby’s car safety seat.

And then Wendella sensed another presence. She stood up and took a step toward a large potted plant beside the car seat. Another pair of eyes, these more probing and in an unsmiling face, returned her still-startled gaze. The pink bow tied around a diminutive curl suggested the gender of the second infant, who was reclining in another car seat, which was almost concealed by the planter.

“Oh, my! Oh, my!” was all Wendella could muster.

A third object on the porch caught Wendella’s eye. It was a diaper bag; pinned to one strap was a folded sheet of paper. Wendella removed the paper and unfolded it. The even handwriting belied the writer’s anguished state of mind.

His name is Kevin Chanko. I call him KC. Her name is Kendra Sable. They were born on June 2. Please let them know that I love them very much. I hope you all will forgive me one day, but I don’t know what else to do.

There was no signature; Della assumed that the writer was the twins’ mother. Inside the diaper bag was a summary of each baby’s immunizations to date.

When she had finished reading, Wendella looked up from the handwritten note. Instinctively she scanned the vehicles parked on the street in the immediate vicinity of her home; they all seemed unoccupied.

Wendella thought, *Oh, baby girl, you trust me with your children’s lives; why couldn’t you trust me enough to come to me in person, so we could do this another way?*

After staring toward the street a few moments longer, Wendella turned back into the porch. She carried the car seats and diaper bag into the house. Remembering that she still had not retrieved the newspaper, she returned to the porch and brought the paper inside.

As Wendella had scanned the street directly in front of her house, on the roadway that ran perpendicular to the Scotts' home a female figure sat slightly slouched behind the steering wheel of a car parked at a space close to the intersection. She pressed her right forearm against her midsection, tightly clutching the fabric at the side of her blouse, as if trying to restrain her emotions in that way. With her left hand she covered her mouth, as if fearing that she could not suppress her sobs otherwise.

Less than an hour earlier, the young woman, Gloria Okumba, had parked the car a few feet from the Scotts' driveway. Stealthily she had placed, first, her infant son, and then his twin sister, each still in a car seat, on the Scotts' porch just beyond the outward swing of the screen door. After setting the oversized diaper bag next to the car seats, she had returned to the car, driven around the block, and parked at the side of the road. From that location she had a clear view of the Scotts' porch and front yard; the house was the first one on the block.

After not quite a half-hour's wait, Gloria had seen the Scotts' garage door rise. She had familiarized herself with their Sunday routine: Around 8:15 a.m. Daniel Scott would open the garage door, start the car's engine, back the vehicle out into the driveway, lower the garage door and wait for Wendella, his wife, to come through the front door two or three minutes later. She would pick up the Sunday newspaper from the porch steps, toss it inside the house, lock the front door from the outside, walk to the car, and get in on the passenger side. The Scotts—Dan and Della, as they were called by family and friends—would then head to church for 9 a.m. Sunday school, usually not returning home before mid afternoon, following the morning service.

As Gloria watched Della turn away from her direction and head into the house with the second car seat, she started the car's engine. Even as Della wondered about the well-being of the foundlings' mother, Gloria struggled to resist driving back to the house and reclaiming her babies. But she was sure that now she could trust her own fate to no one but herself. As the traffic light turned green, she pulled away from the curb, signaled a right turn, and drove instead six blocks to the home of Tillie Walker, the woman who for the previous seven years had been guardian to Gloria and her own twin, Joy. In less than eight hours Gloria would use the one-way bus ticket in her handbag. After that, for her there could be no turning back.

Gloria made the short drive home with deliberate care. She was almost single-mindedly focused on remaining calm. She could not allow her profound grief to completely overwhelm her now; all that

remained for that woeful day to reach its inevitable conclusion was the start of her bus journey. She opened the garage door, parked the car, and lowered the garage door shut. Having set the car's emergency brake and turned the engine off, she removed the key from the ignition. The ring of keys slipped from her grasp onto the floor as a trembling hand betrayed her increasing inner turmoil. She retrieved the keys and stepped out of the car, mechanically shutting the door behind her. Mechanically she walked to the door that led from the garage to the house, unlocked that door, and entered.

If ever an eighteen-year-old needed to hear the comforting voice of her twin sister or guardian or feel the arms of her fiancé enfolding her safely, Gloria Okumba did. Instead, the very silence of the house mocked her; its emptiness engulfed her unsympathetically. Gloria herself felt as cold and desolate as the house she had returned to, because none of those three people was in her life at that moment, and she knew that at least two of them would never be again. The best she could hope for now was that at the end of her three-thousand-mile bus trip to Florida she could begin putting her life back together and, maybe, one day be reunited with her beloved children.

As the full reality of that morning's events began to seep into her consciousness, Gloria asked herself if she really was doing what was best for her babies. Would they reach adulthood safely? Until the previous few months, Gloria had never doubted that she herself would. Unlike her identical twin, Joy. Now Gloria wondered: If their mother hadn't died of a blood clot in her lungs seven years earlier, would things have turned out better for Joy and herself?

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Gloria and Joy Okumba were born in Mississippi, where they had lived briefly with their mother, Anita, and their grandmother. Tillie Walker's family had been their neighbors. The girls' parents had never married; their father, Percy, had been abusive to their mother. When the twins were two years old, Percy was sentenced to seven years in prison for the near-fatal stabbing of another man in a barroom brawl. Anita had made her escape to Florida with her daughters then. A few weeks after the girls turned five, word had reached Anita from Mississippi that Percy had been killed in a fight with another inmate. Anita's own mother died in Mississippi a few months after that.

Tillie Walker had been Anita's godmother; she was the closest to family that the twin sisters had after Anita's death. Tillie traveled to Florida to bring the twins to her home in California. Until then, Tillie had never met her goddaughter's children. In fact, having left Mississippi more than twenty years earlier after a dispute with her own

About the Author

Anne Samuel is a semiretired educator and computer trainer. A perennial student herself, with a strong interest in diverse languages and cultures, she enjoys exploring both fictional and nonfictional worlds through her writing. Under the pseudonym M.A. Laborde, she writes primarily fiction.

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