

Waiting for Sophia

By Rita Wilson

Kensie raps on the aluminum screen door, which reverberates with each tap. “Hello?” she calls, knocking again. She presses the button on the black iron handle, pulls the door open, and walks into Sophia’s living room. “Hello?” she ventures.

“Kensie,” Tina calls from the kitchen. “Is that you? Sophia’s not back from her dad’s yet. Come in and have a piece of pie.”

Kenzie glances at the mantle clock, which is stuck at 5:47. She guesses the time to be after 10:30, since her morning soccer practice ended at ten, and she only stopped at home long enough to change out of her cleats and into tennis shoes, at her mother’s insistence. She walks across the faded moss-green carpet, which smells of dog. Duke, their German Shepherd, is nowhere to be seen. He’s old now, and Kenzie guesses he’s on Sophia’s bed. She decides not to bother him and turns the corner into the kitchen.

“Hi, Kenzie,” Tina smiles tightly with her mouth. Kenzie can’t see her eyes—a soft shade of blue that Sophia inherited. They’re hidden behind dark glasses, and Kenzie giggles. “Tina! Why are you wearing sunglasses in the house?” Tina mumbles something about the eye doctor. *But it’s Sunday*, Kenzie thinks, and she looks closely at Tina, who is dressed in grey sweatpants and a loose-fitting blue plaid flannel shirt,

although the August morning is already making its heat felt through the open kitchen window. Tina's face is partially hidden by her blond hair, which is not in her usual high ponytail. Kelsie wonders why Tina's making pie at 11 am on a Sunday when she hears a low growl coming from the hallway that leads to the bedrooms.

"What's wrong with Duke?" Kenzie asks. "Do you want me to go check on him?" She turns to head to Sophia's room.

"No!" Tina replies. Kenzie flinches at Tina's abrupt response.

"Sorry, Sweetie," Tina says, and pulls Kenzie to her in a tight hug. She releases her slowly and ruffles her brown curls. "No, thank you. Duke is fine."

As if to disagree, Duke growls again, in a low, extended warning tone.

Tina turns to the counter next to the stove and opens a drawer. She reaches in and takes out a knife.

"Hey Girlie," Kenzie hears Garrett's drawl oozing into the kitchen, and she turns to see him, wearing only his undershorts, one hand tucked into his waistband, rubbing his stomach, the other in a half-wave. He runs his hand through his thinning brown hair and rests his palm on his scalp.

"Put some clothes on," Tina whispers.

"Aw, she don't care, do ya, Pumpkin?" Garrett winks at Kenzie and turns back toward the bathroom.

Kenzie feels her heart pound and her face flush, and she presses her lips together. Tina slides the knife through the warm pie, and steam escapes, releasing the

sweet, tart smell of baked apples. She turns the knife on its side, slides it under the pie, lifts a piece from the pan, and glides it onto a plate. Warm, syrupy apples ooze out from between the crusts, and Kenzie's stomach rumbles. "Here, Sweetie," Tina says, offering the plate and a fork. Kenzie reaches for the pie and looks up at her friend's mother, but Tina's gaze is focused on something outside the kitchen window. "Look, Kenzie. Do you see those birds?"

Kenzie leans on the counter and steps up on tiptoe to look out the window, and Tina points to the large oak tree in the front yard. Two pale grey-brown birds balance on a low, thin branch. "Do you know what they are?" Tina asks.

Kenzie shakes her head. "They look like pigeons."

"They're not pigeons," Tina says, "they're mourning doves. I read that they mate for life."

"What do you mean?" Kenzie squints, looking out at the doves.

"They have the same partner for their whole lives."

Kenzie cocks her head in thought. "What happens if one of them dies?"

"They mourn just like we do when we lose someone. Sometimes they keep coming back to the spot where they lost their mate."

"That's really sad," Kenzie says.

"Well, it is, and it isn't. Sometimes they move on and find another partner. But they'll always miss their mate." The frown on Kenzie's face concerns Tina, and she continues. "Do you know what else I read about mourning doves?"

Kenzie looks away from the window and up at Tina. "What?"

"I read that they're a symbol of hope." Tina takes a deep breath and lets out a sigh. "Okay, Sweetie, let me give you that pie. You can sit here in the kitchen." She hands Kenzie the plate and sees Garrett hovering in the hallway. "You know what, Kenzie, it's nice outside. Why don't you eat this on the porch while you wait for Sophia?"

Holding the plate of pie with both hands, Kenzie pushes the screen door open with her shoulder, and the aluminum door bangs shut after her. She backs herself up to the porch swing and steps up onto the balls of her feet, hopping backward onto the swing. The bounce gives the swing momentum, and she rocks gently, her legs dangling just above the cement, as she cuts into her apple pie. She hears a soft *coo-ooh-ooh* and sees that the mourning doves have descended from the tree and are pecking at the ground in the front yard. She sets her fork onto the plate quietly. "Hey," Kenzie calls softly. "Hey." The mourning dove closest to Kenzie lifts its head and looks at her with large, dark eyes. The bird is close enough for Kenzie to see a circle of light blue surrounding each of the dove's dark eyes. She looks closely at the mourning dove and notices black oval spots dotting its greyish brown wings. *This is definitely not a pigeon*, she thinks, and smiles.

A loud crash clatters from the kitchen; it sounds like a stack of dishes has crashed to the floor. Kenzie hops off the swing and calls through the screen door, "Tina, are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Kenzie," Tina shouts. "Don't come in. I don't want you to step on any glass." It's quiet for a few seconds. "Kenzie," Tina calls, "leave your plate on the porch when you're done. Go down to the corner and wait for Sophia there. You guys can go to your house, okay?"