

A SOLDIER'S REDEMPTION

by Lorenzo Louden

EXCERPT

Mom was always on the go—and too busy to do much loving on us. I had no sense of her having an actual job. I didn't know how we were surviving without a dad. Whenever Mom would leave, she'd say, "Now, don't open the door for anyone! I'll be back in a couple of hours. I fixed some bottles for your sister, Ardie. You make sure she eats. And there's food in the fridge if you get hungry." (My name is Lorenzo, but people called me Ardie.)

She had already shown me how to put the bottle in Jan's mouth, and how to change her cloth diapers carefully so I wouldn't stick her with the safety pins.

One day, my Uncle Bubba, who was twenty-six, and my Uncle Leodis, who was twenty-four, were beating on the door, hollering for me to open it. (Mom was their baby sister, born in 1939.) There was no one home but me and Jan. I knew it was my uncles at the door, not strangers, so I would have opened the door. But the door had a double-sided lock that required a key.

I kept hollering through the door, "I can't open it! I can't open it! I don't have the key!" My uncles went looking for the maintenance guy. Next thing I heard was the sound of keys jangling. Then the door opened and my uncles came inside. They had this look of shock on their faces when they realized there was no one home but me and my sister. There was usually some lady or another that showed up to sit with us when my mom took off. That one time when my uncles came by, we were there by ourselves.

Uncle Bubba and Uncle Leodis had their hands up over their noses and mouths. I'd been changing diapers and it was stinky in there. My uncles glanced at the roaches running around. There were always mice and roaches.