

# At the Shopping Center

I pass behind her as she maneuvers an empty grocery basket into its slot in the parking lot. There is no spring in her heels like other eight-year-olds. Her hair is curly but thin, as if growing anew. Delicate legs carry her in Deliberate steps, Unsteady steps. Measured steps, as if she is on a mission to return that basket to its safe home.

The mother watches from the car door. As the basket clangs into its nest, the child turns on wobbly legs and pulls a baby doll from under her arm.

Holding it to her chest, she carefully steps toward her mother. I cannot see the child's face, but in the mother's there is a mutual agony. She brushes back the defiled hair and smiles at the child clutching her doll— as if she, too, aches to clutch her child right there in that parking lot.

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