

# In the Dillard's Parking Lot

*by* Steven J. Kolbe

*for Rita Katherine*

My niece Katie is wailing outside for all the world to see. We are standing in the Dillard's parking lot and she is drawing everyone's attention. Well, everyone in a 46-block radius. It has just been that kind of weekend--a wailing weekend. My sister-in-law Betsy is on the verge of wailing herself.

"Care!" Katie shouts from her stroller. "Care!"

"Chair?" Betsy interprets. "Did you see a chair you liked in the store?"

Katie is *way* into sitting in chairs right now. So much so that her face is drenched in tears over this one, which she explains between sobs was a "Katie-sized chair with stripes." It would've been the *perfect* chair to sit on, and now it's gone forever.

I brush her wet bangs out of her face and tell her the restaurant will have all kinds of chairs--giving her a sort of "there are plenty of chairs in the sea" speech. But there's no consoling this one.

Finally, Betsy gets her to calm down through a strange maternal ritual, invoking a mysterious form of Voodoo that only mamas seem to possess.

On the surface the scene is absurd--Katie wanting to sit in a chair so passionately that she can't breathe. But when I look into my own

life, I find it just as riddled with striped chairs. Haven't I at times yearned for ever-greater heights, for chairs upholstered in the finest stripes and plaids and filigreed arabesques? Haven't I too often ached with a blind and destructive thirst that could not be satisfied? And then, when I failed to achieve the object of my desire, haven't I dug myself great, swimming-pool-sized pits of sorrow just to express to the world how deeply I *did* want that thing and how deeply sad-and-mad I am about not getting it?

In this parking lot, Katie sobs and screams over the striped chair that got away, and I come to believe a thing I've been telling others to believe all along: that when we stand before the gates of ultimate perspective, we'll see--because how couldn't we?--that all these desires of ours were like chairs in a department store and that all these broken hearts we've hauled around this earth were barely even bruised. And then--after generations of hurt and frustration have fallen away--we'll all pile into the car and go to lunch.

