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

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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.