

DO DOLL HOSPITALS DO GOOD?

CHAPTER ONE

Every child has a doll. I do. Do you have a doll? Is it a boy or a girl doll? If you have a doll, why don't you bring it along with you next time. Then we can all talk together. And there will be twice as many people in the group.

Have you ever thought about your doll? Really thought about him or her? I mean just what is a doll? I used to think my doll was a copy of a small live kid. I don't think that way anymore. I've changed my mind.

Even grown-ups have dolls. Did you know that? My father still has the doll he had when he was a small boy. My mother says some grown-ups collect dolls. Then they put them in glass cases. Can you imagine!

My mother gave me my doll when I was two and a half years old. I'm four years old now. I've had her for three years or so. Do you think that makes my doll three years old?

My doll's name is Roller. That's the name I gave her when I first got her. When she came to me she didn't have a name. When I first came to my mom and dad I didn't have a name either.

My name is Jesse. I think my name fits me. After you read my story, you can decide that for yourself.

Roller's name fits her. She has a round face and a round head. She doesn't have any hair. Her body is very chubby. I sometimes call her "rolly-polly." I think she looks like she's made of three big chunky stones, one on top of the other. But she isn't. I know that. She's made of stuff just like me and you. But she's not just stuff. She's much more than just rubber and plastic. Just like I'm much more than blood and skin.

I've often thought about where my doll came from. One day I asked my mother and she said, "I bought her for you at the toy store."

"Where was Roller before she came to that toy store?" I asked.

"I guess she was at the dollmakers," Mama said.

"And before that?" I asked.

"In the mind of the dollmaker," Mama said.

"Oh," I said, shaking my head from side to side. "I see. I see."

Have you ever thought you understood something when your mother was saying it, but you later think you didn't understand it at all. That's what happened the day my mother talked about what was in the mind of the dollmaker.

Roller has green and grey eyes. That means they are a little green and a little grey--not one or the other--but both. My mother said her eyes were hazel. I'm not sure about that. I don't know the color hazel.

Roller has a small open mouth. I can feed her a small bottle of water. If I do, in a very short time, she wets. Then I change her diaper.

Once I fed her milk in her bottle. Then I took a little myself from the bottle. My mother told me not to do that again. "Milk doesn't agree with Roller, and you're too old to be drinking out of a bottle."

"Why doesn't milk agree with her?" I asked.

"I guess Roller must be allergic to milk," she said. "Lots of babies are."

I'm allergic to beans. Are you allergic to anything?

My doll is not a fancy doll. She doesn't have hair that you can comb and wash. She doesn't have many sets of clothes. She only has one outfit. When it gets dirty, my Mom washes it.

I talk to my doll all the time. When I ask her questions, she puts a voice in my

head that gives me answers. Sometimes when I'm feeling sad, I go into my room and sit on my bed and talk to Roller in a very soft voice. I explain to her what is happening. And she listens. After I've talked with her for a while, she understands. And I feel better.

Roller looks like a real baby. She's my baby. She's a nice baby. She's a good baby. She's real. She's a real baby doll. She's as real for me as I am for my mother.

This is the story about what happened to Roller at the doll hospital. And what happened to me when Roller had to go to the doll hospital. But now I want to tell you what my sister said when Roller was in the hospital with the doctor and nurses and I was waiting for her to come home.

"What's the matter with you? You're always so sad. Why don't you ask mama to get you another doll? There are thousands of them in the store. There's no reason in the world for you to go around so miserable. You act as if dolls are real. Grow up!"

"But Roller is real," I said.

"No she's not," my sister yelled at me. "You only think she is. It's all in your mind."

"That's not true," I yelled back.

"Well then, prove it, I bet you can't," my sister said.

My sister is ten years old and she thinks she is so smart. But sometimes she can be so wrong. How could I name Roller if it wasn't real? How could I share my thoughts and feelings with her if she wasn't real? How could I share my thoughts and feelings with her if she wasn't real? How could I care for her so much, if she wasn't real? How could she be so good, if she wasn't real? How could Roller put answers in my mind when I talk to her, if she wasn't real?

Isn't it funny. Some people who think they are so smart, aren't smart at all. And they don't even know it.

CHAPTER TWO

I go to day care center. Do you know what that is?

I think a day care center is where you go when your mother and father have to go to work and you are too young to go to school. And there's no one left at home to take care of you.

Is that what the words "day care center" mean to you?

I have lots of friends at the day care center. There's Yolanda, Gabriella, Katrina and Francis, Pablo and Lakeesha, Claude and Genevieve and Elizabeth. And there's Ramona. Romana with her green eyes and long black hair and her soft voice. I like Romana.

We have a teacher. His name is Mr. Williams. I like him a lot. Some of the kids think he's a little goofy. Even Ramona thinks he's a little goofy.

"Look at the way he walks?" she says.

"That's just because he's so tall," I answered. "He kind of hops or lops."

"And what about the way he talks?" Ramona says. "I never heard anyone who sounded like that."

"That's because he comes from another country. When he was a boy he didn't speak our words. He spoke other words."

"Oh," said Ramona. "It was the same with my Mom and Dad. They spoke Spanish in their country. They didn't speak English till they came here. Did Mr. Williams speak Spanish too?"

"I don't know," I said. "But I don't think so. Mr. Williams looks very different from you."

"So what?"

"Maybe there are other words besides Spanish," I said.

"Like what?"

"I don't know. But we could find out."

"How?"

"We could ask Mr. Williams. I'm sure he'd tell us, if he knew. And I'm sure everyone remembers what language they spoke when they were a baby."

Mr. Williams has a lot of black curly hair and a very short nose. He does look different in some ways from me. But in other ways, we look alike. His eyes are different. But his mouth is the same. He smiles a lot. Sometimes he picks us up in his long arms and puts us way over his head. Then things seem very different.

There are other kids at the day care center. But they're not my friends. I don't play with them unless we're playing group games. Then, Mr. Williams plays with us and I feel safe.

Some of the kids at the day care center don't like me. James and Harold can be very mean to me. Let me explain.

Mr. Williams told us we could bring our dolls to the day care center. Of course, I always bring Roller. James and Harold never bring their dolls. I don't even know if they have dolls. And they don't seem to like me because I do have a doll. I don't understand it. Do you?

One morning we were almost at the Center. My mother was driving the car. I was sitting in the back in my car seat. Even though I'm four, I still have to sit in a car seat. My father says it's because I'm still small for my age.

Anyway, all of a sudden I remembered Roller was not with me. She was still lying in her crib by my bed.

"We've got to go back home, Mama," I yelled. My mother stopped the car.

"Why, Jesse?"

"I forgot Roller." My mother started to drive the car again. She pulled out into the street and looked through the window pane.

"If we go back, I'll be late for work," Mama said calmly. She kept right on driving the car.

There I was strapped into my car seat. I wanted to get out but I couldn't. I began to cry. I didn't want my mother to get to get in trouble with her boss. But I didn't want to go to the Center without Roller either. I didn't know what to do.

My mother just turned around and looked at me, then started looking out the window again. By this time I was crying pretty hard and had awful pains in my stomach. It was just like some of those really bad times I used to have in my high chair. Remember the high chairs?

"Okay," my mother said. "I guess it is really important." And with that she turned the car around and we started home.

"Isn't she good?" I thought to myself. "She's the most beautiful person in the world." Don't you think so?

CHAPTER THREE

The very same day that I forgot Roller was the day we all talked about our dolls. When I arrived at the day care center, I was carrying Roller in my arms. For a while, I just stood at the door and looked at everybody playing. Some of the children were coloring in their books. Francis and Lakeesha were playing teaparty at the little tables. Ramona and James were playing with the little people at the big doll house. Gabriella and Katrina were playing legos.

Everybody was doing something except Stefan. He was sitting on the floor by Mr. William's desk with his blanket sucking his thumb. I just knew he was daydreaming.

"Why do you always bring that ugly old doll with you?"

"She is not ugly."

"She has no hair."

"Lots of babies have no hair. Do you think they're ugly?"

"She's fat."

"So what?" I said. "Lots of babies are chubby. Sick babies are thin."

"Her clothes are old and all the colors are old. That's because your mother has washed them so much."

"She's still beautiful," I whispered more to myself than to Stefan. I could feel the tears coming down my cheeks. And my nose was running. Then I heard Mr. Williams speaking to Stefan in his different voice.

"Stefan, would you ask everyone to form a circle?"

"Why?" he asked. He was still holding his blanket.

"I think we should all have a talk," Mr. Williams said, motioning the other children to gather around on the floor.

"About what?" Stefan asked.

"Boy," I thought to myself. "Stefan really asks the teacher a lot of questions when he's told to do something. Do you think that is right? I bet Mr. Williams doesn't like it one bit."

When we were all in the circle on the floor, Mr. Williams sat down next to Stefan with his legs crossed. Gabriella and Francis had brought their dolls. They were in the circle too. I held Roller in my lap. Lakeesha sat next to me and put her hand on Roller's head.

"This morning I thought we might talk about our dolls," Mr. Williams began.

"Only three of us brought our dolls today," Francis said.

"That's okay," Mr. Williams said. "We all know what our dolls look like. I'm sure we can remember what it is like to be with them."

"I don't have a doll," James said.

"For now, James, why don't you try to think about what it would be like if you did have a doll," Mr. Williams said softly. "Now, do all of you think your dolls are pretty?"

"Yes," we all yelled out together. Even James yelled "Yes." I guess he was imagining.

"Do all of your dolls look the same?"

"No," we all yelled together.

"This is fun," I thought to myself. I was beginning to feel a little better.

"Then how can all of our dolls be pretty and yet be so different?" Mr. Williams asked scratching his black curly hair.

"Maybe they're from different countries," Katrina said.

"What do you mean, Katrina? Could you tell us more?" Mr. Williams asked.

"No," Katrina said.

"But then Lakeesha said, 'Maybe Katrina means the dolls are different colors. And they are all very pretty.'" When Lakeesha said that Katrina just smiled but said nothing. Then, many people started talking at the same time.

Finally, Mr. Williams said, "I can't hear what anybody is saying. Remember, we said that when we have these group talks, we'll talk one at a time. Otherwise, how can we share what we think?"

The room grew very quiet. Then Francis stood up and moved to the middle of the circle holding up his doll. It was a boy doll with short red hair and freckles. He was wearing a shirt and blue overalls. Everyone was very quiet.

"My doll's name is Andy," Francis said. "I think he's pretty. And I don't think he looks like any other doll." Then Francis said nothing. We all waited for him to continue, but he just stood there with his doll.

"Could you tell us why you think Andy is pretty, Francis?" Mr. Williams asked.

"Yes, I think so. He's got a round face and long arms and legs. They feel good to hold. He's got nice eyes and nice hair. He's got boy clothes that fit him and make you think he is always ready to play. And I like his freckles. They're just great on his face."

"Those are all good reasons, Francis," Mr. Williams said. "What do the rest of you think?"

Now Stefan spoke. "What if I thought Francis was wrong? What if I thought his doll was ugly?"

"What could I say?"

"I guess we'd have to give reasons why we thought that about his doll," Mr. Williams answered.

"Not just reasons, Katrina said. "Good reasons."

"Oh!" Stefan said. He now began to suck his thumb again, still holding on to his blanket. I thought he was finished talking. Then, he said, "What if I said I just didn't like his face?"

"That wouldn't be a good reason," Gabriella said. "You would have to say why. I mean you would have to tell us what you think is wrong with the doll's face."

"Suppose I said I've never seen a face like that before?"

"That's not good enough," I said. "I bet there's lots of different faces from many different places that you haven't seen. They might all be pretty."

"How could that be?" Mr. Williams asked.

"I don't know," I said.

"Boy, am I stupid," I said to myself. "I say words and I don't even know what I mean."

"Can anyone help?"

When we have group talks, Mr. Williams often asks us to help each other. He once told us, "When we help each other, we all learn to think better."

Maybe he's right, because I would have never been able to guess what happened next. Harold raised his hand. Harold is one of the kids who really scares me. He can be so mean. And I'm sure he doesn't have a doll.

"Maybe it means you can have lots of different dolls with different hair and different shaped eyes and different skin colors, but they can all be pretty in their own way."

"How would that be, Harold?" Mr. Williams asked.

"Maybe just because they are so different," Harold said.

There was a lot of talking now in the group. Everyone seemed to be saying something to someone. Finally Gabriella raised her hand. We do that sometimes when we have group talks. We don't always raise our hands. But sometimes when we all start speaking at once, Mr. Williams says, "We need to take turns speaking."

"I think taking turns is a good idea. Do you?"

When Gabriella raised her hand, she said loudly, "Listen, the doll just might be a very good doll."

Lakeesha stopped stroking Roller's head now and raised her hand. "But that's not the same thing, Gabriella, is it? That tells how the doll is, not what she looks like."

"But don't they go together?" Francis asked. "I mean the doll could be a very good doll, Lakeesha, and when you saw his face, you would know that right away." While he spoke, Francis walked around the inside of our circle, holding up his doll, and looking at each of us very hard.

"So if the doll did good things, you think he would be pretty?" Mr. Williams asked.

"When you think of a person you like very much, don't you think she's beautiful?" Romana asked. This was only the second time Ramona had spoken today.

"That's a very good question, Ramona?" Mr. Williams said.

"What's the difference between pretty and beautiful?" Stefan asked.

"There is no difference," Katrina said.

"Maybe one has to do with what's on the outside and one has to do with what's on the inside, Katrina," I said.

When I said that, all the other children yelled out, "Yes." That made me feel even better.

"What do you mean?" Mr. Williams asked.

"Sometimes I can just look at a person and I know right away if they are mean," I said.

"But you can be wrong" Lakeesha said very slowly. "I once thought this person was very beautiful. I just wanted to be near her all the time. And I loved to touch her face. One day she was very very mean to me when no one else was around to see what she was doing. I've always been frightened of her since then."

"I bet if you got to know her for a long time, you wouldn't be tricked," Francis said. "It would show."

"I'm not so sure," Lakeesha said very softly, moving closer to me. "I'm not so sure."

That was the end of the talk about our dolls---how they look and how they are, and about people---how they look and how they are.

Now that the talk was over, I wanted to play with Gabriella and Francis. But they didn't want to play with me.

"Why don't we make a little circle with chairs for our three dolls so they can sit and talk? We can put the circle in the middle of the room. After a while, we could make another circle around them and we three could join them for a talk. And then, we could make a larger circle, and the other kids and Mr. Williams could sit and talk with us. Then we could have another group talk. What do you think?"

Gabriella and Francis just looked at me. They didn't say anything.

"We could raise our hands, listen to what each of us has to say, ask good questions and give reasons for what we think. That way we could help each other think better," I said.

"No. I want to play. I want to play with my doll. And I want to play with my doll alone."

"I think Gabriella is right," Francis said. "It's time now for play. Our dolls might feel funny after we've talked about them for so long. We should stay close to them."

"When Francis said that, it seemed so right. Later, I said to myself, "How does he know how a doll feels?"

CHAPTER FOUR

Do you think dolls always tell the truth? I always tell the truth. But sometimes I think that maybe Roller doesn't.

Mr. Williams is very strict about the truth. I don't know why, but he is. When we first started going to the day care center, he said to us, "There are not many rules here, but the ones we do have are very important. For now, the two I want you to remember is that we must always treat each other as persons and always tell the truth."

We just looked at him for a long while. I wasn't sure that I understood what he had said. And do you know what? He just looked right back at us, as if to say, "You know very well what I mean." It seemed like he looked at us forever. Nobody said a word. Finally, he said, "Now, how about playing a game?"

The day after Mr. Williams told us about the rules, Katrina got very upset. She had brought her doll to the Center that day. It was a very special doll. I had never seen a doll like it before. She had long black hair and dark skin. She wore earrings and a long dress. Katrina told us that she was a Hopi Indian doll and she was wearing

a ceremony dress. The dress was red, red, red with a purple and blue shawl. And the shawl had many sparkles on it. I thought the doll was beautiful.

"Katrina, could I play with your doll?" I asked. "She might have a lot of fun with Roller."

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't want her to play with anyone but me."

"That's selfish."

"I don't think it is."

"Why?"

"First, my doll cost a lot. And two, there are only a few dolls like this in the world."

"There's only one," I said, and moved away from her. But as I did, I said, "They aren't good reasons. I still think you're being very selfish."

"Hey, how many of you would like to hear a story about a little boy from China?" Mr. Williams asked.

"I don't want to hear an old story," I thought to myself. "I want to play with Katrina's special doll." I went over to the doll house where Ramona was playing with the little people.

"Why don't we play house?" Ramona asked. "I'll be the mother, James can be the father and you can be the baby."

"Okay," I said. But I thought to myself, "they always ask me to be the baby. I know why. It's because I'm so small. But I don't like it. I just bet they are not treating me as a person."

But I have to admit, I had fun. Ramona is so funny as a mother. She even tried to pick me up and carry me across the room. Can you imagine?

Even though I was having fun, I kept right on thinking about Katrina's doll. I even said to myself, "Katrina isn't treating me as a person either. I'm going to tell Mr. Williams. She's breaking the rule."

Then I noticed that Katrina and James were going out the back door holding hands. Right outside our door, we have a small playground. In the playground there is a slide, a sand box, a sec-saw and a climber with a steering wheel.

"Here's my chance," I said to myself. Katrina had left her doll sitting on one of the little chairs in the tea-time corner.

"I'll just go over and bring that doll to the big doll house," I said to myself. "There she can play with Roller." And before you knew it, there I was walking across the room with Katrina's doll in my arms. When I got to the doll house, I waited for a few minutes. I was trying to decide which room Katrina's doll would be most happy in. At first I thought I would put her in the living room. Finally, I decided on the back bedroom. "She'd be happy there," I said to myself.

With that I heard Mr. Williams voice. "That's a lovely doll you're holding," Mr. Williams said. "Is it yours?"

"No," I answered. "It belongs to Katrina."

"Did she say you could play with it?" Mr. Williams asked.

"Yes," I said and with that placed the lovely Hopi doll in the back bedroom.

"It's time for lunch," Mr. Williams called out loudly. "I want everyone to wash their hands and set up their lunch boxes at the little tables. Come on, now," and he motioned to the people out in the playground to come in for lunch. When Mr. Williams would call like that, he would cup his hands over his mouth so his voice would be louder. Usually, his voice is very soft.

All of a sudden, I heard this awful scream. "Where's my doll? Who took my doll?" It was Katrina. I was kneeling by the front of the big doll house. I didn't say a

word.

And then do you know what happened? That girl acted like a real baby. She had a tantrum. She started crying and screaming and throwing her hands up in the air, all at the same time. Everyone just stared at her. Finally, Mr. Williams went over to her and said, "Katrina, I know where your doll is. She's just fine."

With that, Mr. Williams called me over to the middle of the room.

"Can you explain to Katrina what happened?" Mr. Williams asked.

"No," I said.

"Can you tell Katrina where her doll is?" Mr. Williams said.

"No," I said. I didn't feel like talking very much.

With that Mr. Williams walked over to the doll house and took out the beautiful Hopi doll. He was very careful as he brought her out the front door. Then he made a little cradle for her with his two hands and carried her out to Katrina.

"Here you are, Katrina. Why don't you and your doll have some lunch now. And I would like to see you by my desk," he said motioning to me.

I didn't feel to well. I decided that I really needed Roller. So I ran back to the doll house, grabbed her out of the small front bedroom by the left arm and ran over to Mr. Williams desk.

"You didn't tell me the truth," he said. "I asked you if Katrina had given you her permission to play with the Hopi doll. And you said 'yes.' What do you have to say for yourself?"

"Nothing," I said.

"Do you think you treated Katrina fairly? How would you feel if she took Roller without telling you?" Mr. Williams asked, kneeling down in front of me. "What made you say something that wasn't true?"

I started to cry. "I didn't do it, Mr. Williams. It must have been my doll. Roller wanted to play with the Hopi doll as much as I did. I'm sure it was Roller who lied."

Mr. Williams took off his glasses off his face and started to wipe them with his handkerchief. "I don't think so," he said. "I really don't think so."

Have you ever had something happen and you just know that you couldn't have done it? So you just think your doll must have done it? Or your teddy bear? Or your cat? Well, that's just how I felt.

Anyway that was the day that Katrina got very upset. That night when Roller and I got into bed, I said to her, "Well, do you think this was a good day?"

Roller answered, "No, I don't think so. I think we could do a lot better tomorrow."

"How?"

"We could promise ourselves to tell the truth."

"Why?"

"What if everyone lied any time they wanted to? You would never know when anyone was telling the truth. How would you like that?"

"I'd hate it, Roller. I mean if Mr. Williams told me that he really liked me when he really didn't like me, that wouldn't be fair."

"Maybe that's why it's important to tell the truth. Maybe it's just being fair."

After I had my talk with Roller, I felt a little better. But then I started thinking about Katrina and her beautiful doll and how I'd feel if someone took Roller away without telling me. Then, in a second, I felt miserable.

Later my mother came into my room and asked if I would like her to read a bedtime story.

"Yes," I said. "Mama, would you read me Jack and the Beanstalk? I remember my mother starting the story in her own special reading voice. In a little while, I was fast asleep.

CHAPTER FIVE

I told you I'd tell you about Roller's visit to the doll hospital. I keep my promises.

Do you know about doll hospitals? They are places where dolls go when they get sick. They go there to get better. Doctors and nurses are supposed to make them well again.

Roller got sick on a very special day. It was my father's birthday. My mother and father told me and my sister that many relatives were coming to daddy's party.

"What are relatives?" I asked my Dad.

"Relatives are members of our family," he said.

"Like who?"

"Your grandmother and grandfather, your aunt, uncles and cousins."

"How will they all get to our house?"

"Grandma and Grandpa will come by car. Your aunt and uncle and cousins are coming by bus. And two of your uncles are coming by airplane."

Mama got up very early and began cooking food for the birthday party. My sister got up very early and cleaned her room. I got up very early and fed Roller her breakfast. My dad got up very early and set the long table in the dining room. First he put out glasses. Then he put out big dinner plates and pretty knives and forks that we only use when people visit. Under each fork, my Dad put a large blue napkin. In the center of the table, he put two long blue candles.

"I'll pick up some Spring flowers and we'll put them in the center of the table also," he said to me as he walked round and round the table. "The colors will set it off. What do you think? Is it beautiful or not?"

"Very pretty, Dad. You do good work."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes," I said. Dad looked at me for a minute, but I didn't say anything. I wanted to tell him about our talk at the day care center about our dolls, but I couldn't remember anything.

"What will you do till the guests arrive?" Dad asked.

"I'll play with Roller. I think I'll take her for a ride in the basket on my tricycle. We have a lot to talk about."

And that's just what I did. That's how Roller broke her head or how I broke Roller's head. I was riding along talking to her about something that happened at the day care center when I hit a bump. Roller popped right out of the basket onto the sidewalk.

I stopped my bike. There was Roller lying on the concrete on her back. I felt sick. I picked her up in my arms very slowly and turned her over. The back of her head was cracked wide open. I could see inside. It was awful.

"Oh, no," I said. "Oh, no!"

After that, I don't remember what happened. Somehow I got Roller home. I was crying very hard and I don't know how my mother knew what was wrong. But when I showed her my doll, she knew right away.

"Don't worry dear. We can take Roller to the doll hospital and they'll fix her up just fine."

"Hospital. I thought you only went there when you were going to die."

"No, that's not so," my dad said. "Hospitals are there to make people better. Doll hospitals exist to make dolls better."

"Now? Can we go now? Can we, Dad?" I sobbed.

My mother and dad looked at each other. Then my father said, "Couldn't it wait till after the party. How about going tomorrow morning?"

When my father said that I cried harder. Finally, my mother said, "Why don't I give the hospital a call and see if I can sign her in today?"

"What does that mean?" I asked.

"Roller will probably have to stay in the hospital for a few days while they fix her head," Dad said.

"Couldn't we just wait for her? I'll wait for her all day. I'll stay right there."

"I don't think that will be possible. Roller has a broken head. It is going to take time."

"We won't know anything for sure till we talk to the doctor," Mama said. "Now let's get ready and get over there. People will be arriving for the party in two hours."

I've never been to a hospital. Have you? I'm not sure what goes on there. I mean how do you know good things go on there? How do you know that all the dolls get better?

I've never been away from Roller for even one day since the first day that she came to me. She and I do everything together. Just the thought of her being far away in a strange building with doctors and nurses was very scary. Would the nurses and doctors bathe her the way she likes to be bathed? Would they give the right medicine at the right time? Would they pick out the right kind of crib for her to sleep in? Would they play with her when she was lonely? Would they be very careful when they picked her up? Would they talk to her in a soft voice the way I do when she is sad? Would they give her some toys? Would there be other dolls for her to play with during the day? Would they really be able to make her better?

These are all the questions I was thinking about as I sat in my car seat on the way to the doll hospital. When we got there, I had the most terrible pains in my stomach. I bet the thoughts caused the pains.

The doctor who was waiting for us wore a long white coat and a long tube-like thing around his neck. I didn't like him.

"Don't you worry about a thing, young one," he said, looking down at me. "We'll fix her up fine in a few days. Now let's take a look at her."

"Are you telling me the truth?" I asked.

"Sure am," the doctor said.

"How would I know?"

"In five days, you can see for yourself."

"Five days! Why does Roller have to stay here all that time?"

"It takes a while to order a new head, to get it here and to put it on just right," the doctor said as he continued to examine Roller.

"A new head!" I shouted. "You're going to give Roller a new head?"

"No way of fixing this one. Look at it for yourself. It's cracked wide open. I'll have to get another head from the company. Just hope they still have one in stock. You've had this doll for quite a while. It's the size that counts. Even if the head is a little different, you won't mind, will you? Sometimes they change the eyes or the color tone of the skin a little. Most people don't even notice the difference."

I didn't say anything. I just stared at the doctor. What could I say to somebody who says things that are so wrong. "And to think he is a doctor," I thought to myself.

I knew I wanted to get out of the hospital. I didn't ask anybody for permission. I just turned around from the counter, walked out the front door to the car, and climbed into my car seat. I left the car door open, but I didn't care.

"I hate hospitals," I said to myself. "They don't do good at all."

After a while, my mother and Dad came out to the car. They sat in the front seat but didn't say anything. My father didn't start the car. When a few minutes had passed, he got out and closed the back door. Then he opened it again, strapped me into my seat, and closed it again.

My mother finally said, "Don't be so sad. Roller will be just fine. I'm sure the doctor will find an identical head. I told him how important it was to you."

"What's that mean, Mama?"

"The same, dear. The head will be the same."

"I don't think so, Mama," I said.

"Why do you talk like that?" my dad asked.

"Roller will never be the same."

"You probably won't even be able to tell the difference," my father said.

That made me really mad. "Oh, yes, I will," I shouted. "What if I went to the hospital and came home with a new head? How would you both feel? I bet you could tell the difference."

"But that's a different situation," my father said softly. "You can't compare the two things. You're not a doll."

I didn't say anything. Finally, he started the car and we drove home. When the family arrived for the birthday party, I went to my room and laid on my bed for a long time. Finally, my mother came up to my room and said, "Aren't you going to come to your father's party?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't feel like it."

"You know, your father's a person too. Think how he's going to feel if you're not at the table when he blows out the candles on the birthday cake."

"I don't care how he feels."

"How would you feel if Dad didn't come to your birthday party?"

"Not very good, I guess."

So I went to the party. But I didn't have a very good time.

Five days is such a long time. It seems like years and years. During that time, I did so many things without Roller:

I went to the day care center alone.

I ate my breakfast without Roller.

I took a bath without Roller.

I rode my tricycle alone.

I looked at television alone.

I played with Gabriella and Francis without Roller.

I slept in my room alone.

I played doll house with Ramona without Roller.

I thought about things that happened to me alone.

I asked myself questions and gave myself different answers without Roller.

Then one afternoon when my mother picked me up at the day care center, she said, "Guess what? Roller is ready to come home. We can stop by the doll hospital and pick her up."

I didn't say anything.

"Won't you be glad to see her again?"

I still didn't say anything.

"You do want to pick her up, don't you?"

I wasn't quite sure what to say. Then I thought of Gabriella and Francis. "What would they say," I asked myself. Then I said to my mother, "I guess so."

The doctor was waiting for us when we walked in the door of the doll hospital. He had Roller on the counter wrapped in a blanket. "Well, look who is here, Roller?" he said.

"Did you give her a new head?" I asked.

"Sure did. Now she's fit as a fiddle."

I just looked at the doctor, but didn't say anything. After my mother gave him some money, I picked up my doll and carried her to the car. When we got home, I

brought her to my room and laid her on my bed. I wanted to talk to her, but I just couldn't.

I unwrapped the blanket and took off her clothes. Then I put her clothes back on. I turned her over and over again, looking at her real hard. I held her close to my chest and put her back down on my bed. Then I wrapped her back up in her blanket.

"What will I do with her?" I asked myself.

Then I got my little chair out of my closet and put it next to my dresser. I took Roller in my arms, climbed up on the chair, and put her on top of the dresser. She was still wrapped in her blanket.

Days come and go now. My doll is still up on my dresser. I've never taken her down since the day I brought her home from the doll hospital.

Ann Margaret Sharp