**STORY B—It’s a Boy!**

“Congratulations, you have a new baby boy!” my child-development teacher said as she handed over the 10-pound bundle.

Last year in my high school child-development class, each student had to take the “Think-It-Over” baby home for a night to get a taste of parenthood. Even before I received the baby, I knew I was not ready to be a parent as a senior in high school. I could still remember when my brother and sister were little and I would have to take care of them all the time. At least the doll had no dirty diapers I would have to change.

It was a Friday night when my turn came to take the 10-pound plastic doll home. The doll really did look like a live baby from a distance. It even had a pleasant baby powder smell. After I took the baby home in his car seat, I changed him into some really cute clothes because my friends and I were going out that night. I then decided to name him Tyler.

Inside the body of this doll was a computer that was programmed to make periodic crying sounds. I was the only person who could stop the crying because I had the key. This key, tied to my wrist, could be inserted in the doll’s back to stop the crying. So far, so good. The doll had not cried, yet.

My friends came over, and we all piled into the car. It was kind of squished because we had the baby’s seat in there, too. I had to treat the doll like a real baby because the computer inside also measured any abuse to the doll, such as shaking or neglect. The hour-long drive to the restaurant was uneventful. It was rather chilly, so I decided to wrap Tyler in a blanket and carry him in that way. I also had a diaper bag with diapers, a bottle, and an extra set of clothes hanging on my arm.

Because it was Friday night, there were a lot of people waiting in line to get a table. When I walked into that crowded entryway, I got some very weird looks and quite a few raised eyebrows. My friends also noticed the glares and stares, so we decided to make a game out of the whole situation. I stood in the corner pretending to rock Tyler to sleep. Every once in a while my friends would peek in the blanket and say, “Oh, how cute.” I could not help but laugh. And although it was funny to my friends and me, some of the people did not think it was so funny that I had a baby. I overheard one couple say, “Why would she bring a baby here?” These people were giving me rude looks and forming judgments about me because they thought I was a teenage mom. Others just smiled at me sympathetically and felt sorry for me because I was only a child with a child.

We finally got a table, and the waiter, not knowing I was carrying a doll, asked me if I needed a high chair. I told him it was just a doll, but a high chair would be good. He thought it was funny that I actually dared to bring a doll into the restaurant, so he brought a high chair, plus a red balloon for the little one.

Again, during our meal, my friends and I received strange looks from the others in the restaurant. One couple kept walking by our table just to get a look at my baby. I think they were trying to figure out if the doll was an actual baby. As the couple walked by, my friends and I started discussing how people so quickly judged me and assumed that I was the mother of the baby. We decided that we would probably do the same if we saw a teenage girl coming in with a child and a group of friends. Teenage pregnancy is not accepted where I live and is definitely not the norm; many girls would hide their pregnancies if they decided to keep their babies.

We went to the mall after we were finished eating, and I had to take Tyler with me. My friends were looking at clothes, but I couldn’t because I was carrying this “baby” (which was becoming quite heavy). So I just roamed around wishing I could try on clothes, too. Then the baby started to cry this horrible imitation baby’s cry. It was so loud and terrible. I quickly put the key into the doll’s back so it would quit crying, and then I had to explain to the salesclerk why I was carrying around a plastic doll. I was so glad to finally go home.

I learned a lot through my experience with the “Think-It-Over” baby. The doll definitely reinforced my thinking that I was not ready to be a parent, but it also made me more aware of the larger picture. It opened my eyes to the judgments people make about others. People do not realize that some things are not the way they seem. The doll seemed like it was my baby, but that was not the case. I was only carrying it around for a class project. The people in the restaurant were so quick to judge me because they assumed I was a teenage mom. They undoubtedly thought I was stupid for taking a baby to a noisy, smoky place; they didn’t realize it was just a plastic doll underneath that blanket.

I sometimes catch myself judging people I do not know, just because of the first impression they give. In reality, I do not have a clue about their real stories. I especially think people judge teenage girls with babies too quickly. Sure, they may have made a mistake, but the girls usually know that, and they are the ones who have to pay the price. I only experienced the glares and rude comments for one night, but I thought of all the girls who have to deal with these looks wherever they go. We should all be slower to judge these girls, or anyone else, and realize that some things are not as they seem.