



William's Doll

William wanted a doll.
He wanted to hug it
and cradle it in his arms
and give it a bottle
and take it to the park
and push it in the swing
and bring it back home
and undress it



and put it to bed
and pull down the shades
and kiss it goodnight
and watch its eyes close



and then
William wanted to wake it up in the morning
when the sun came in
and start all over again
just as though he were its father
and it were his child.

“A doll!” said his brother. “Don’t be a creep!”
“Sissy, sissy, sissy!” said the boy next door.



“How would you like a basketball?” his father said.

But William wanted a doll.

It would have blue eyes

and curly eyelashes

and a long white dress

and a bonnet

and when the eyes closed

they would make a little click

like the doll that belonged to Nancy next door.

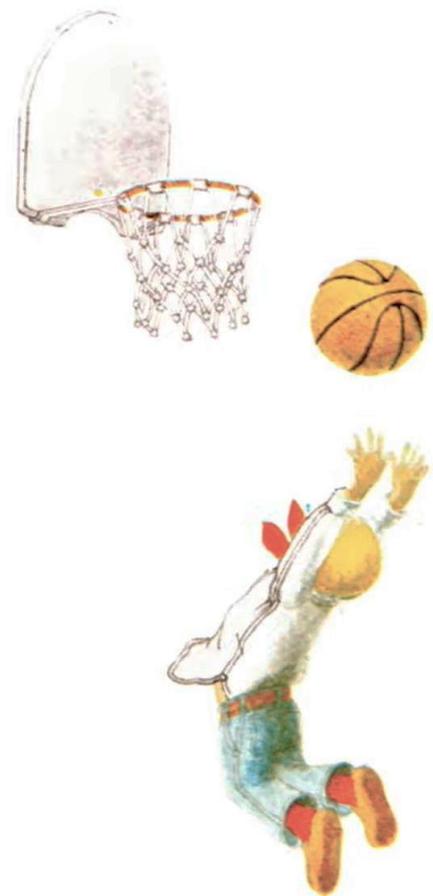
“Creepy” said his brother.

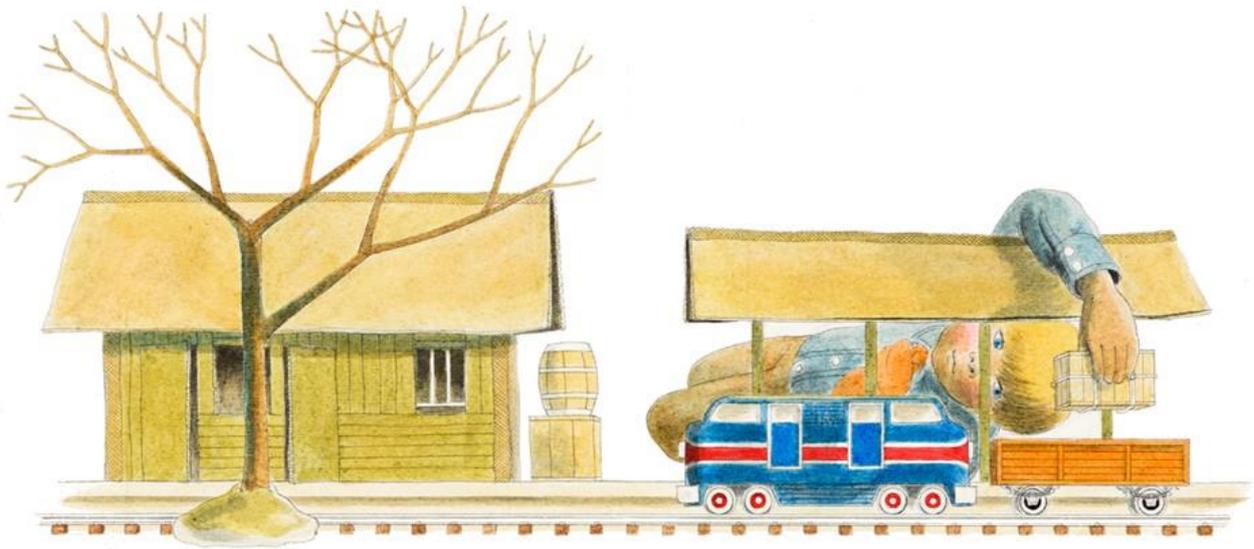
“Sissy sissy” chanted the boy next door.



And his father brought home
a smooth round basketball
and climbed up a ladder
and attached a net to the garage
and showed William
how to jump as he threw the ball
so that it went through the net
and bounced down into his arms again.

He practiced a lot
and got good at it
but it had nothing to do
with the doll.
William still wanted one.





His father brought him an electric train.
They set it up on the floor
and made an eight out of the tracks
and brought in twigs from outside
and set them in clay so they looked like trees.

The tiny train
threaded around and around the tracks
with a clacking sound.



William made cardboards stations
and tunnels
and bridges
and played with the train a lot.

But he didn't stop wanting a doll
to hug
and cradle
and take to the park.



One day
his grandmother came to visit.

William showed her
how he could throw the ball through the net
attached to the garage outside.

He showed her the electric train
clacking along the tracks
through the tunnel
over the bridge
around the curve
until it came to a stop
in front of the station William had made.

She was very interested
and they went for a walk together
and William said:
“But you know, what I really want
is a doll.”
“Wonderful,” said his grandmother.
“No,” William said.
“My brother says
it will make me a creep
and the boy next door
says I'm a sissy
and my father brings me
other things instead.”
“Nonsense,” said his grandmother.





She went to the store
and chose a baby doll with curly eyelashes
and a long white dress
and a bonnet.
The doll had blue eyes
and when they closed
they made a clicking sound
and William loved it
right away.

But his father was upset.

“He's a boy!” he said to William's grandmother.

“He has a basketball
and an electric train
and a workbench
to build things with.

Why does he need a doll?”



William's grandmother smiled.

“He needs it,” she said,

“to hug

and to cradle

and to take to the park

so that when he's a father like you,

he'll know how to

take care of his baby

and feed him

and love him

and bring him

the things he wants,

like a doll

so that he can practice being a father.”



Charlotte Zolotow
William's Doll

New York, Harper & Row, 1972