

They must think I plan it. Wear my crummiest clothes to visit them so they feel sorry for me and take me shopping to buy new ones. That's how parents think. That's not the way it is. I carefully, meticulously select my most fabulous garments, so that this time, perhaps, we can skip our shopping ritual. I have since childhood had a very unwholesome relationship to new clothes based on a genetic predisposition to spill. I resolved this problem in adulthood by not buying new clothes; when I get new clothes I get new used ones. This way, I don't feel bad at the end of the day when I notice the egg yolk. When I wear my most fabulous new used garments to my parents' house, it only buys me a couple of days. One, two days into the visit, my mother picks up items with disdain "you never dressed like this when you were my daughter." So we shop. They buy me expensive new clothes that I ruin in record time.

/ This last visit was particularly stressful; it was the first time they had ever visited me. They couldn't visit me before because I always lived in New York City where I never even had a door in an apartment, much less a guest room. First off, they want me to redecorate. They don't like the rattan sofa and the velvet chair in the same room. Rattan velvet. I can hear that rattan and velvet don't go together, but actually, it doesn't look too bad if you think of them as the sofa and chair. Sofa, chair. See how that fits? They discuss furniture styles, as I think about food spills on new fabric. Stop, please stop. Okay, but if I won't let them redo my furniture I have to let them buy me clothes. My mother threatens

to leave on the next plane if I don't. Nobody's ever taken her up on one of those threats. Want me to call you a cab? I didn't say that, I should say that, but I let take me shopping to put an end to it. Now there's only a certain amount of this I'm going to be able to tolerate. I don't go to malls. Why should I surround myself with people who can wear clothes without incident? I tell them they don't have malls here; they tisk and shake their heads at the savage place to which I've come. Then I silently decide that I won't waste their money; I'll only buy something if I can't ruin it. It starts calmly at Penney's. My mother dashes to the underwear department. How many pairs of underpants? Four? She picks out four pairs. It's thirty dollars. Thirty dollars for four pairs of underpants that don't look like they're going to make it through one wash; I will ruin these underpants. The first purchase and I've failed. I want to quit shopping and say so. But now I am a prisoner of shopping parents. I look at dozens of items; they are looking too. They approach me nodding, wearing alien grins and displaying garments on hangers. Nothing fits. I try on things that look like bags I've borrowed from a great aunt. A saleslady finally admits that the shirts are too big and maybe I need petites. Petites! There they go; they're looking for petites. Dad grabs a female bicycle police officer and demands to know where he can find a store that sells petites so he can buy something for - he motions disparagingly at me with his thumb. She tells him there's a petite store at South Center. My heart skips as the policewoman gives him directions.

He doesn't know South Center is a mall. I could faint. Have a tantrum. why not, they're not behaving like grownups either. I say I'm tired of shopping and I want to go home. Dad holds up the pitiful wee bag that contains my undies and shakes his head. It will require a much bigger bag to bring shopping to a close. He follows the directions to South Center, and as the profile of the shopping mall rises in the distance, I can see them levitate slightly in their seats. "Why it's a mall, it's a beautiful mall." Tears of joy. They are rejuvenated; I hold my breath to keep from hyperventilating, the way I do in malls. They smile at the familiar names on the directory: Casual Corner, Bennelon. They spot the 5-7-9 store. I like the music; the clothes aren't for anybody over fourteen. The parents are crestfallen. My father gestures to the fifteen or sixteen clothing shops along the way, and points to the bench where he will be waiting for us. Modern clothes make my head look the size of a pea. There are no shirts without pads; take out the pads, the thing falls like a drape. The prints belong on curtains, too, not on a person. We go from store to store, my mother making eye contact with my father who watches each door expectantly looking for our triumphant baggie to show that we have successfully shopped. We fail and fail again. I stay too long in a try on room, looking at a misshapen garment, thinking, they can't do this to me, I have a dog of my own now. The saleslady comes in. "Your father's here. He told me to wrap up the shirts you tried on, that you're taking them." She grabs at the one I'm wearing. If you tear it, I'm not taking it.

"Well, hurry up. You're taking them." I will not wear these shirts in a hundred thousand years. Revelation. If I don't wear them I can't ruin them. But I can display them when next the parents feel a shopping spree coming on. Yeah, they're great, wrap them up.