Lawrence Hill

Lawrence Hill (1957-) is an African-Canadian writer who lives in Oakville, Ontario. He is the author of the novel Some Great Thing and a children's history text Trials and Triumphs: The Story of African-Canadians. His short stories have appeared in various magazines and anthologies.

So What Are You, Anyway?

On an airline flight, Carole, a young girl with brown skin, is beset by a nosy couple, who persistently question her about the race of her parents. She doesn't understand what they are getting at but eventually she revolts against the harassment.

Carole settles in Seat 12A, beside the window, puts her doll on a vacant seat and snaps open her purse. She holds up a mirror. She looks into her own dark eyes. She examines her handful of freckles, which are tiny ink spots dotting her cheeks. She checks for pimples, but finds none. Only the clear complexion that her father sometimes calls "milk milk milk milk chocolate" as he burrows into her neck with kisses.

"This is yours, I believe." A big man with a sunburnt face is holding her doll upside down.

"May I have her, please?" Carole says.

He turns the doll right side up. "A black doll! I never saw such a thing!"

"Her name's Amy. May I have her, please?"
"Henry Norton!" cries the man's wife. "Give that doll back this instant!"

Carole tucks the doll close to the window.

The man sits beside Carole. The woman takes the aisle seat.

"Don't mind him," the woman says, leaning towards Carole. "By the way, I'm Betty Norton, and he's my husband, Henry."

The man next to Carole hogs the armrest. His feet sprawl onto her side. And he keeps looking at her.