

Delivery

by Kathy Fish

The doorbell rang. It was an older gentleman wearing a tuxedo, a bundle in his arms.

"Here," he said, handing it over.

"It's a baby," Mabel said. Its wee mouth gaped, emitting an odd, churring sound, like a hummingbird.

The man smiled. "A newborn," he said.

She held the bundle out in front of her. The swaddling came loose. The infant burped. "I was expecting a vintage radio. I didn't order this."

"We had to make a substitution."

"I don't even like babies. The whole motherhood thing..." Mabel shuddered.

"And yet..."

The thing was unwieldy. Mabel held it out to the man. It slipped out of its blankets and fell to the floor.

Mabel and the tuxedoed gentleman stared. The infant yowled.

"Are you going to pick it up?" Mabel asked.

"I don't think so." The man clasped his hands behind his back, yawed to the right and to the left like a metronome. The infant screamed. Mrs. Yeardley, Mabel's next door neighbor, stared from the sidewalk. Her annoying little dog, Huntley, yapped.

"Is there a problem?" Mrs. Yeardley called, but got no response.

"Oh for God's sake," Mabel said. She picked up the baby and hoisted it over her shoulder. "This is obviously a mistake."

"I'm very *good* with babies," Mrs. Yeardley called, a little louder. The man turned and held his hand up to her.

"All's well here," he said. "Just a little adjustment phase. It's quite normal. Go on about your business."

Mabel patted the infant on the bottom, bounced on her knees, swung from side to side. Still, it cried, its damp cheek against her own. The man in the tuxedo was saying something but it was difficult to make out.

"I should get a what? A nine-volt battery? Is that what you said? Come back here!"

The man was already down the steps and unlatching the gate. He turned and smiled. "Well," he said. "Enjoy."

The infant settled lumpily against Mabel's breast. "You smell like oatmeal," Mabel said. She pinched its nose and twisted it. "You are not a vintage radio. Not even close."

