

Baby, Baby...

by Kathy Fish

Everyone's in a hurry. Especially the men, who run for the trains and sacrifice their briefcases to the doors. Men in seats, reading newspapers or paperbacks. Ling is weary of these men. She wants to stick her pregnant belly into their noses. She looks at herself in the window. She's wearing a herringbone maternity suit with a large red bow at her neck. She looks angry and fat, but festive.

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Six weeks after giving birth, Ling goes back to work downtown. She pumps her breasts in the ladies room, sitting on the toilet. Co-workers come in to pee or brush their teeth and the pump squeaks and from the stall, Ling says *sorry...I'm sorry*.

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Before dawn, she buckles the baby into the Escort and sticks a bottle in its mouth. She leaves the car seat at the babysitter's for her husband, who collects the baby when he gets off work and drives the baby home in his Toyota. The baby listens to Bruce Springsteen in the Toyota and Moonlight Sonata in the Escort.

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Ling hands the babysitter a half cup of frozen blue milk in a baggy. The babysitter shrugs. I'll mix it with her formula, she says. You have a run in your stocking.

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Ling doesn't sleep and becomes ineffectual in her job. She'd quit, but they are sort of broke. Suddenly, she doesn't know what any of it

means. What does it mean? She asks her co-workers. What are the codes? What are the procedures? She types a row of question marks, eats prodigiously from a bag on her desk. Sometimes she closes her eyes and dreams that the baby has been put back into her stomach. Only now, the baby is a monkey.

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On weekends, she takes the baby for long strolls. Once they'd gone as far as three miles and the baby got hungry and Ling had forgotten to pack a bottle. She ran all the way back, bumping over cracks in the sidewalk as the baby screamed.

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The husband arranges for a babysitter so they can go to a Christmas party. The party is a Vegas night and they gamble at tables and make small talk with the husband's co-workers and their spouses. At the craps table, Ling whispers to the older woman next to her, *I have a three month old. I can't believe I'm here.* The woman offers a sip of her screwdriver.

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Each working day at dusk, Ling runs into the house and kicks off her sneakers. She reaches up into her skirt and rolls down the band of her panty hose and takes the baby from her husband's lap. She lies on her back, holding the baby overhead and flies the baby back and forth in her upstretched arms. She sings:

*baby baby
flying all over the world
looking for toys and candy*

and the baby smiles and the husband laughs. And the baby's cheeks droop like water balloons. And the baby drops drool on Ling's forehead.

