

MORNING RUSH—METRO

I am sandwiched, feet planted for balance.
All these people and not a single conversation.

We are buried in cellphones and newspapers,
wearing scowls, blank stares, suits, skirts,
overcoats, ties, belts, lipstick, styling gel
earbuds, briefcases, purses, and ID badges.

And in the middle—a baby in a stroller
pumps her soft plump legs
reaches down with determined passion
and tugs off her right shoe.
Dad, her pilot for the day, can’t stop what happens next.
Blam! She throws it in front of the stroller,
a place he can’t reach.

The shoe sits,
a pretty blue gauntlet
on the drab gun-metal gray floor
at the feet of a scar-faced guy
in leather and chains.

After a few seconds, the guy bends to pick it up,
hands it back to Dad.
A wordless thanks, a nod.

L’Enfant Plaza is next.
The train stops.
Commuters rush off and on, and
Baby is oblivious to all but one thing.
Look! The orange and green stripes
of the tiny sock on her foot sing.
Off it comes. Down it goes.
Five perfect toes astonish the air.

Leather and chains cracks a smile.
The spiked hair guy with headphones grins.
The woolen cap guy with glasses, too.
Leatherman picks up the sweet soft thing
and hands it back to Dad.

Pentagon next.
Train stops.
Suits and uniforms off and on.

We are riveted now, the core of us on board
who know this baby’s mission.
Her other foot is calling.

The train accelerates. We hold our breath.
Off comes the left shoe. Down it goes.

We laugh out loud, and off comes the sock,
the last swift tactical snatch,
the final barrier removed.
Ten piggies do their victory dance
and now she croons and coos.

Oh Baby,
while we gather our briefcases
and button our coats
and step out into the cold air
to run or ruin this world,
sing that song for us,
the only one that matters,
that barefoot song
of joy.

Mary Amato is a writer, musician, essayist, and teaching artist whose work has appeared in The Washington Post, Mothering, Muse, Teacher, Cicada, New Poets Review, and many more. Her published novels include Guitar Notes, Open Mic Night at Westminster Cemetery, and Get Happy. She is the winner of many grants and awards including the Keisler Poetry Prize, the Maryland Library Association's Author Award, Utah's Beehive Book award, and more. She has been a featured speaker for The National Book Festival, the American Library Association, The National Council of Teachers of English, and other national festivals and conferences. Her own teaching focuses on the therapeutic value of writing and the ways that writing can help us to understand ourselves and others.