

# Proud Mary

by Karen Eileen Sikola

Mary had no shoes. She told me they were stolen by someone at the shelter and I believed her because she stood there outside the Arlington T stop in a pair of tube socks. She told me she wasn't asking for money. She told me the shelter was serving seafood today so her meal was stolen, too, and she was starving. *Even just a bottle of water*, she said.

I went inside to see the selection at my building's convenience store and picked out a strawberry Nutri-Grain bar. It seemed easier to eat than the apple I already held in my hand, three bites taken out of it. Mary had no top teeth, a fact she'd felt the need to tell me as if her smile didn't speak for itself. I put the breakfast bar up on the counter with a bottle of cold no-name spring water. *\$2.50*, said the man who always glares at me when I cut through his store on my way in and out of work. I dug through my wallet and found just enough quarters leftover from my trip to the car wash.

When I came back outside, Mary was pacing. She eyed me, held her hands out, and when I delivered the goods, she smiled her toothless grin again. *Strawberry*, she said. *My favorite*.

