

Rae

She looked like an exaggerated hourglass because she carried most of her weight in her thighs and right below her waist. We always saw each other on the subway. Her hip jutted out, one hand resting on the circle of fat, the other twirling one of her red curls. I always nodded at her when I hopped on; she would feign a smile, look away, then clutch her bag closer to her body. She usually wore Doc Martens, a floor-length skirt, and a denim vest with patches on it. My favorites were the floral ones with sayings like "not yr sweetheart" and "riot don't diet."

One day I worked up the courage to sit next to her. Two weeks prior, I had tried smiling at her instead of nodding, but that didn't catch her attention. The next week, I gave her a thumbs-up and a stupid grin and then headed to another car because I was so embarrassed. This time, I kept my head down, holding my bag to my chest, and I plopped right down next to her. I looked at my lap with my back hunched the whole time. Occasionally, I would sneak a look out of the corner of my eye. Twenty minutes later, we reached her stop. She rested her hand on my thigh to lift herself up. She lifted one corner of her mouth and gave me a thumbs-up. My ears turned a fiery red.

Throughout the day, I replayed the scenario again and again in my head. Was she flirting? Was she annoyed? I didn't know.

The next day, I got on the subway and stood by the door of the car, holding onto one of the handles. She got on a few stops later. I took a deep breath, let go of the handle, and sat down next to her. I gave a big, stupid smile again and then hid my face in my hands. I peeked through my fingers and she gave a reciprocal smile. I lifted my face from my hands.

"I'm Amy," I said.

She pointed to her ears and shook her head. I had this whole speech I was going to give about how I liked her patches and shoes, but she couldn't even hear me. She put her hands back down on her lap and smiled.

The following day, I brought a notebook and a pen. I scribbled *I'm Amy* on the first page and handed it to her. She snagged the pen from my hand and wrote *I'm Rae* right below it.

Our conversations filled the entire notebook over the course of six months. One day, she wasn't on the subway. She wasn't there the following day either. I never did see her again, but at least I had her sense of humor, all the things she cared about immortalized in our notebook. And that was enough.

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Third Place



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