

Woman

It's my second time in New York City and I squeeze onto the crowded subway car, awaiting a seat one can only hope will free up. I disregard the smells and overlook the sweaty palms grasping the pole I avoid touching at all costs and remind myself that I am absolutely in a city I never want to venture from. I glance around, I take it all in, I come across a woman not much older than me. With saddened eyes, she entrances me and suddenly, I am empathetic toward a woman I don't know and a story I've never heard.

I take notice of the anxious tendencies she silently claims: the leg shaking, the nail biting, the knuckle popping, even her fidgeting with the dainty ring she wears. She is thin and, presumably, hot. It's seventy degrees and there are at least thirty people around that refuse to stop talking, or groaning, or singing and spilling their hot breath.

She is in a long sleeve. Because of this, I find myself watching; judging as she cranes forward, only to see we've not yet gotten to her stop and leans back with composed agitation. She folds her arms, neglecting to fix her left sleeve as it rides up. We stop once more, and I should be getting off, but I don't.

For a split second, I see them. There are three or four sites of injection, undoubtedly few of many. I feel my eyes well up with tears but quickly manage to contain myself as we make eye contact. She pulls her sleeve back down and offers one of those "*I wish you'd stop looking at me, but I don't want to be rude*" smiles and turns her back to me.

It's my second time in New York City and I slide off the subway car. I see her glance around and jog into the arms of another woman. She's older than both of us and I realize that it's her mom. Her sad eyes brighten as she grasps the arms that held her until she was too big to be held. I realize that I am not one to judge. I realize that, though I *feel* empathetic, I *act* superciliously. This woman I feel sorry for is absolutely a woman her mother grew for nine months, nursed for few, and loved for many; she and I alike.

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I can't know if she's addicted, or if she's just begun, or if she's gotten off of what she chose to shoot up that first time. I know very well, however, that she is human. In this moment, she is happy.