

# City Girls Never Need Car Keys

by Martha Rand

City girls never need car keys. They need cab fare and metro cards. City girls don't want cars or to have to hunt for parking spaces. But they all know the parking prayer, for when their boyfriends or husbands, trying to impress them, drive them around on dates. Here's the parking prayer: Hail Mary, full of grace, please help me find a parking space. That prayer is passed from Catholic girls to Jewish girls to Moslem girls to the Bahia and back again and said in silence while boys and men curse loudly in the driver's seats they occupy. City girls need fast strides and the kinds of eyes that see everything with their wide, take-it-all-in, peripheral vision. City girls make no eye contact with passing strangers.

Rural girls come to the city and say, "I ought to be able to dress any way I want, and those boys shouldn't be shouting obscenities at me, no matter what the f..."

That was the conversation that night, after both girls got back to the beige painted, L-shaped studio they shared. Janice was a playwright whose most exciting experience had been making love on the edge of a lake as a tornado's black funnel cloud tore down the opposite shore.

City girls have sympathy for that rural girl point of view but basically they're more pragmatic. City girls think: don't be in the wrong place at the wrong time, wearing the wrong things in front of the wrong people.

"Janice, when you come from Kansas and you move to New York, you don't wear practically nothing walking down the street and expect not to be harassed...!" Amina poured them each a glass of wine.

"But this is the big city!" Janice yelled angrily.

"...by guys on a hot summer day drinkin' beer in Hell's Kitchen!" Amina continued quietly and calmly. "It's an unspoken rule of the urban environment. Maybe I should have put that in the suggestion section of our roommate contract, especially for roommates from 'west of the Hudson.'"

The young women made their little squinty-eyed cat faces at each other and took a sip of wine, agreeing to disagree.

City girls avoid the potential excitement of walking down a deserted subway tunnel where they might be stopped and asked for all the money in their bag, or worse. City girls take out their cell phones if they hear footfalls too close behind them on a silent street. They make a phone call, and before the connection is consummated, they pretend to have a conversation identifying exactly where they are, loudly enough to be heard by the owner of the falling footsteps behind them, in case they're being followed. City girls make more decisions in every single moment of their waking lives than rural girls make in a month of afternoons on the edge of a still lake in the eye of an oncoming storm.

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