

Always Start Your  
Car With Two  
Bells

emily george



*Redrawn*

3 - 2 - 02

ALWAYS START YOUR CAR  
WITH TWO BELLS



EMILY GEORGE

this book is for Leigh and the old green trams

No real person has been depicted in this story although actual place names have been used to retain some validity.

Cover drawing of tram by Hinerangi

Copyright © emily george 1985.

This book has been made entirely by women.

Published by: Dykebooks, P.O. Box 168,  
Brunswick East, Melbourne, Victoria, 3057.

Printed by: Sybylla Co-operative Press and Publications Ltd.

Typeset by: KitchenTableType.

Cover design and screenprinting by: Jet

National Library of Australia card number

ISBN 0 949056 00 6

Maggie was convinced. She'd never learn the sections and the prices or remember to ring the bell every time to start the tram again. She didn't even know in which direction they were travelling half the time. It was all very bewildering. And keeping her balance with a heavy leather bag over one shoulder as she tried to clip the tickets in the right place and dispense change at the same time while the tram lurched in a way calculated to send her flying, was no easy matter.

"Your first day out is it?" a passenger asked sympathetically. How had she guessed? "I used to be on the trams myself. You'll soon get used to it."

If I don't make an absolute idiot of myself first, thought Maggie, giving the woman a wan smile.

Her trainer reminded her of Alf Garnet but he was competent enough as he hovered by her elbow giving her the necessary instructions as she needed them. "We've just crossed Punt Road so we're in section three, and it's now sixty cents out." She punched the ticket accordingly while John rang the two bells and then had to brace herself against the back of the seat to stop herself from hurtling to the back of the tram as it started again.

This job was more complicated than she'd expected. Back at the depot over a much-needed cup of coffee from the canteen as they waited to pick-up again, Maggie could still feel the movement of the tram as she sat in her chair not game to let John out of her sight for fear she'd be left behind or lost. Everyone else seemed to know what they were doing as they strode confidently round the mess-room.

Mid-morning and the noise was at its height, with the T.V. blaring, two games of pool being played, dozens of brown uniformed trammies chatting over cups of tea and iced buns and the interruption of the P.A. system with what seemed to Maggie to be incomprehensible messages from time to time, although everyone else seemed to understand what was being said.

"Time to pick-up." John was saying and Maggie clutched

her bag and followed him downstairs to stand at the tram stop with their driver till their particular tram came along and they relieved the previous crew for their meal-break.

As soon as she was on board Maggie was absorbed once more in this new demanding working world that she'd entered so suddenly after months of being on the dole. Which had been all very well but being constantly poor had got to her after awhile and with not much choice in the matter Maggie had finally resorted to applying to be a connie with the hopes that eventually she might get to be a tram driver which had been an unfulfilled ambition of hers for years.

The tram stopped suddenly to avoid a car making a U-turn which had all the standing passengers falling over each other and Maggie clutching frantically for a free strap.

"You alright?" John put out a hand to steady her.

"Of course." she mustered her dignity and straightened her bag into a more business-like position.

The tram started again. "Sounds as if we've got a flat." John said.

"Pardon?" she was sure the tram's wheels were made of steel.

"A flat, hear that?" It just sounded the usual thumping, trundling noise the tram always made, but Maggie didn't like to seem ignorant by asking for clarification. It obviously took awhile to develop an ear for these subtleties.

The same with the points. "See these points." John would say as they stood in the yard looking down at what appeared to Maggie a bewildering array of tram lines going every which way.

"Yes." she'd say doubtfully.

"It's the connie's job to change the points. Not really in actual fact, it's really the driver's job but we always do it anyway as a kind of courtesy on the job, if you know what I mean?"

Maggie had observed this curiosity which was an accepted and well-established fact. Even at the school they'd been shown how to change the points while being told it was the driver's job. On the road the automatic points and those manual points that needed changing as they went along were still the driver's responsibility but at the shunts and running into the depot or out of the yard, these were always done

as quickly and efficiently as possible by the connie. Maggie had observed that it was almost a matter of pride to anticipate the needs of the driver on a particular set of points so they didn't have to get down from the cabin.

John bent down, inserted the points bar and pushed. "See how I have just moved the points so the line is now running in a different direction?"

Maggie looked, didn't see, but nodded anyway. She was sure such optical skills would develop with time, although she rather feared that one day due to her lack of competence she might send a tram hurtling in the wrong direction.

Maggie tried to remember some of what she'd been taught at the school but it didn't seem terribly relevant on this lurching tram, as she fumbled in the bottom of her bag for some of the change that made it weigh a ton, trying desperately to recall which section they were in and not recognising a single land-mark as she bent down to peer anxiously out of the window.

By the end of the day she was exhausted but exhilarated too, for she was beginning to feel she might just make it after all.

"See you at seven tomorrow," John said, "And don't forget to get yourself a purse for your six dollars change which you must remember to keep with you all the time."

Maggie had just spent a harrowing twenty minutes counting up her money, almost forgetting to put aside the six dollars float every connie was given to start with and kept till they stopped being a connie, and had stacked her tickets in her tin with some difficulty for they had to be in a special order for the convenience of the revenue staff.

When she got home Maggie gave Jacquie a detailed description of her day from the time she'd signed on at the starter's office, through the confusion of the day, to locking her bag in her locker overnight.

"And I have my very own outfit, a bag and tins and tickets and all of that kind of thing. I'm a real live connie and I think I'm going to like it."

"You look very spunky in your uniform I must say it suits you." Jacquie grinned in appreciation.

"I'll be a lot happier when I can get into trousers instead of this skirt, although I refuse to wear stockings, I think



form was so brief she was back outside again within minutes. She'd hesitated at the counter after handing it in, conscious it was almost an anti-climax after everything else, saying a tentative goodbye and thanks to the depot manager, who'd answered with an unsmiling, "Perhaps you'll be back with us again, one day." And that was that.

A final session with the doctor on the way home to pack some more. As they'd decided to spend Xmas in London to avoid the usual family shinigans on the day (and Jacquie wanted to have a white Xmas for a change) all the celebrations and present giving were being done beforehand and with so many friends to see before they left this final couple of weeks were quite a hectic round of social events.

It was sad in a way. She'd made many friends over her months at the depot. She had lunch with Maeve and Blyth at a pub near the Junction and drinks after work with Hadley and Blyth at the Pub. She had no hesitation in avoiding the traditional piss-up at the local with the boys.

Everything was being done for the last time. All these skills she'd learnt, all the specialist knowledge she had, would be redundant in a few days and she regretted the passing of such a solid time in her life.

Her last morning, on a broken, it was pissing down and ironically the raincoat which had finally arrived and never been worn, was still in her locker at work, so that she was saturated by the time she arrived at the depot. Ordinarily this would have been a calamity but not on her last day and it was warm enough that she soon dried out.

Hanging onto these final hours Maggie delighted in her competence as a driver, handling the controls and guiding the tram with a skill she could recognise in herself as something to be proud about. She was a tram driver. She'd been at the depot for all of ten months or so, not long, and while she might be moving onto other experiences, this part-

icular time was something to be remembered and hold within her always.

Tomorrow she'd hand in her uniform and pick up her severance pay and be unemployed again. For today she was a tram driver. And as she hurtled her way through the Junction, she revelled in this special wisdom.

Melbourne, 1984.

DYKEBOOKS is a self-publishing alternative and was established because as women we need to have control of our own writing and how we choose to have it published.

ALSO PUBLISHED BY DYKEBOOKS

SAPPHO'S WILD LESBIANS by Emily George

This book covers one summer on the beaches of Lesbos and the community of lesbians who were there during those long hot days.

Whether it was sleeping in the bamboo huts on the beach, eating and drinking at the many tavernas with a view over the sea, swimming in the blue Aegean, dancing at the disco under the stars, or having love affairs, those weeks were full of activity and fun that not even the threat of scorpions could diminish.

While friendships were made across international lines, hearts broken, tans acquired, and lesbians queued for haircuts, life in the Greek community continued, providing an exotic background for these lesbians on holiday.

Recommended price: \$6.00

LOOSE WOMEN by Emily George

From her two years as a paid co-ordinator, the writer has produced a book about women's refuges which incorporates many of her experiences and observations during that particular period.

The book traces many of the political implications for such a radically different program and also the personal triumphs and disasters that happen to women in refuges, be they worker or resident.

It also explores the developing sexual awareness of Agnes towards becoming a lesbian, and the ways in which refuges can provide a warm and supportive environment for the women concerned.

Recommended price: \$9.00

MUCH MADNESS by Emily George

This is a fantasy tale of the women animals' community, which has isolated itself from the other place in order to find some more peaceful existence whereby they might live and love in harmonious surroundings.

The illustrations by BOBBY TATLOW faithfully record the happenings and interaction of the women animals and are remarkable in themselves.

It may be correctly assumed this is feminist propaganda, but the combination of reality and fantasy make it almost irresistible.

Recommended price: \$6.00

All being well and the finance forthcoming the following books should also be available during 1986 (or sometime thereafter.)

ANNA by Emily George

A love story with a difference, the ups and downs of a lesbian relationship.

AFTERNOON SUBURB by Emily George

Two women, both married at the beginning of the 70's and how their lives change with the advent of the Women's Liberation Movement.

MERRI LEE by Emily George

Another feminist fantasy about a C-R group of women who take over an inner suburb and make drastic changes.

The above is not final and any correspondence will be gladly entered into.

Previous publications by Emily George:

'emily george' 1976  
'Woman' 1978  
'Elspeth Brown' 1979  
'The Accident' 1980

(no longer available)

About the writer:

Emily George was born in Melbourne in 1944. Over the years she has worked as a nurse, married, had two children, worked as a waitress, obtained a B.A. degree, divorced, worked at La Trobe Uni, travelled overseas, worked in a women's refuge, been a connie and a tram driver, also a C.E.P. worker at Women's Liberation Switchboard, and hopes for an early retirement. Emily George is a radicalesbian liberationist, who lives and loves and works in Melbourne (when she is not travelling to other places that is.)

To order these books or for more details about DYKEBOOKS, please write to:

DYKEBOOKS,  
P.O.Box 168,  
Brunswick East,  
Melbourne,  
Victoria,  
Australia, 3057.





sky  
boats  
the  
sky

lex



ISBN 0 949056 00 6