

Life without a car and why I bought one

In towns, the penalty for carlessness is long, cold, wet waits for buses that, at times, seem to have become extinct, great red dinosaurs that finally gave up the ghost somewhere down the Mile End Road, never to be seen by human eye again, only discovered eons later by careful archaeologists, hulking skeletons covered with sand.

5 And the time that leaks away if you have no car at your command – 10 minutes here 20 minutes there, a queue that loses you an appointment, an overcrowded underground that gets you to a shop as it closes. A philosopher might use such time to muse upon *L'Être et le Néant*; but I manage only to whip myself into a frenzy of impatience, regarding the calm faces around me with fury, hating the human race for
10 such mindless resignation. Nor does having money in your pocket help much. Minicabs operate in a world of their own, turning up seconds after you've phoned while you're still in the bath or never turning up at all, leaving hoarse angry voices and missed opportunities to fill the vacuum. Taxis, prolific on those days when a warm sun decides you to walk, vanish at the touch of two drops of rain, leaving only the voices of their
15 drivers at the other end of a telephone, incredulous or moved to guffaws at the idea that you still harbour hopes.

But the worst of being carless is that sense, laid upon you by most other people, that you suffer from some shameful social disease best not mentionned in polite company. Asking for instructions as to how to get somewhere can be humiliating
20 business. "You have a car of course?" says your guide. "No," you say. The pause that follows is long and heavy, the voice that emerges afterwards is loud and unnecessarily bright. "I have no car on principle," I say hastily. "Of course," says the voice. And of course, carless, you are an inconvenience to others, a faint but constant blackmailing presence silently demanding lifts, organisation, ferryings from one place to another,
25 pick-ups and put-downs otherwise called for only by small children.

Jill Tweedie (1936-1993), *Letters from a Fainthearted Feminist* (1984)