

Don't Abandon Your Baby

THE OTHER DAY, I WAS DRIVING ALONG BY MYSELF IN LOS ANGELES. I was listening to NPR. An elderly woman from Macon, Georgia, was reading a story she had written for *Pecan Nights* magazine about a switch (Southern for “tree branch”) she had been made to bring to a teacher to enable the teacher to punish her by beating her with it when suddenly the switch was turned to licorice by a forgiving and practical-joke-loving God. But because she was old, she was taking FOREVER to read it! Her gravelly, halting voice was barely above a whisper, and she clearly needed a drink of water. She sounded like when my mom eats bananas in silent anger. Why does NPR insist on letting its authors read their own stories? Most of them are terrible. It's painful and makes me anxious to listen to them. I slowed down as I came to a light and pulled up alongside an L.A. cop driving his L.A. cop car. Like everyone else when faced with being next to a potential bully with a Kafkaesque ability to get away with whatever they want (unless of course there's an amateur videographer nearby), I got a little self-conscious. I did what most people in cars do when

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they imagine cops are watching them. I fiddled with my radio like only the innocent would ever do. People guilty of crimes, no matter how severe or petty, absolutely *never* adjust the settings on their radios. This is a proven fact* and one that has guided me through many of these episodes.

As the light turned green I let him pull up ahead of me because I didn't want him to see my "I ♥ My Dog" bumper sticker on which I had Sharpied over the heart symbol and replaced it with the work *Fuck*. That bumper sticker has turned out to be one of my all-time best pickup lines, by the way. Anyway, as the cop got in front of me, I noticed one of *his* bumper stickers. Alongside the ubiquitous and highly effective "D.A.R.E to Keep Kids off Drugs" bumper sticker (remember when people used to sell and/or take drugs before that bumper sticker was conceived and applied?) there was a new, state-sanctioned, police-issued bumper sticker. At least it was new to me. It read "Don't Abandon Your Baby." Hmmm, okay. Thanks for that. I know that's not meant for me, as I am not planning on attending any proms in the near future. But has our society really come to this? I realize that our culture is so violent and we've become so coarse that we can support more than three dozen violent cop shows that feature sick killings nightly, each more shocking than the last. "Chief, we've got some sicko out there who's killing random male stock brokers." "Jesus that's terrible." "Wait, I'm not done. And he's sawing off their arms and using them to rape college co-eds." "Son of a bitch!!" (excerpted from *CSI: Grand Rapids*.)

Do we really need to be told not to abandon our babies? Especially by authority figures with guns and shoot-to-kill dispensations? I suppose the answer is yes. It's one thing when a dear friend or family member asks us not to abandon our baby. Or even a much-loved celebrity, but the cops? Although I will concede a

*See: The Luzene Study, 1987.

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gentleness to the pronouncement that I find interesting. Unlike the demanding and suggestively violent “Buckle Up, It's the *Law!*” one could read their own intonation into it. Say it to yourself (in your head—you don't want to end up on any lists) like an Allied confidant whispering in the ear of their lover as they stand on the banks of the Seine during the height of the student riots. Seems almost sweet. Or try saying it with a bit of wistful melancholy, like a wise old “mammy” talking from experience and passing on her sage advice to the grandchildren as they snap and de-string pole beans on the porch during a hot, swollen, summer day in Georgia. Hey! Where's that NPR lady? Maybe she could try it. She's probably just now about to finish reading her story. Just six more words to go and they can leave the station. Anyway, it takes on a different tone. It's sympathetic and well meaning. It's not at all angry. It doesn't instantly cause your rebellion gene to switch on. It doesn't make you think, “Fuck you, cop! I'll abandon whatever baby whenever the fuck I want, you fucking fascist! It doesn't even have to be a baby, either! I think I'll abandon my car, my pets, and my teeth as well!”

Which leads me to this: what *kind* of person needs to be told, or “reminded,” that they shouldn't abandon their child? People who sit around all day, daydreaming and fantasizing about a future they'll never have because they sit around all day, daydreaming and fantasizing about a future they'll never have? What does it say about our selfish, stupid, and cruel society? I guess that we can be monstrously selfish, stupid, and cruel. The Iraq war (or rather the war we started in Iraq; there really wasn't much of a fight until we set up colonization school) is a good example. It's an amazingly disappointing realization to know just how thoughtless and insensitive to other human beings we can so simply and predictably be programmed to be.

Tossing a thing you don't want or no longer desire to the curb is not really that bad if it's biodegradable, which a baby is, I guess; but come on now—let's apply some standards.

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Abandoned babies are unfortunate unwanted results of a once urgent desire to have an orgasm. That desire is now long, long ago in the past. A distant memory. And much like getting a bill in the mail for a nice meal you ate nine months ago, you see it (baby or bill) and think, “Huh? That was nine months ago? I’m not paying for this!!” And we toss that baby or bill into the bin. Life is cheap here in America. It’s the living that is expensive. Perhaps that abandoned baby would have grown up to shoot someone point blank in the face for twelve dollars and some (admittedly) pretty cool sneakers. That’s still no excuse.

Isn’t that Jesus’ job anyway? Shouldn’t he be whispering in the fevered hallucinating imagination of the drug-addled mom while she passes by one of the hundred of thousands of churches in this country? Why is the cop forced to clutter up the back of his car with a sticker like that? That space might be better used to remind people that if a cop wants, he can beat the shit out of you and can often count on the tacit silence of a thoroughly corrupt force to get away with it. I think that might be a much more effective deterrent to would-be baby leavers. “*I will* beat the shit out of you so that you lose the sight in your left eye and pins will need to be implanted in your jaw so that you will be able to eat again if I catch you so much as even thinking about abandoning your baby!”

Now *there’s* an effective bumper sticker!