

Flipping Off People With Romney Bumper Stickers

by Jennifer Donnell

“Hey,” I begin, a naughty smile breaking across my face before I can get to the punchline, **“Want to drive around flipping off anyone with a Romney bumper sticker?”**

Kaleb chuckles and beams at me. It seems everyone likes a good girl turned naughty. He suspects I'm kidding, but knows there are alternate Universes in which I'd probably do it, for real. When I was eighteen, my boyfriend liked to put “Fuck La Migra” stickers on the back of cop cars, though he didn't speak a word of Spanish. This gave us both a rush, naively unaware of the potential legal implications. I didn't condone it, but what's an eighteen year old girl to do when she's in love with a rebel? The kind of rebel who didn't have a job or his own car- at least he never got caught.

I think it through, “Do you think they'd write down our license plates?” I debate whether or not it's legal under free speech. It probably is, but what if it made someone lose control of their vehicle, or they had connections to an angry cop fond of vigilante justice? I'm as paranoid as I am imaginative. I glance over at a fifty-something woman in a Lexus with a big blue “Romney” sticker. She's got pale skin and glasses on. I imagine myself reaching out the window and raising up my middle finger, like a proud fighter for equal rights. Only, my imagination is at odds with my personal code of ethics. I don't like to cause others pain and doing that would probably personally upset her.

I think about my extended family member with lung cancer. How she bought a house at the wrong time and was then laid off. She can't get proper insurance and sometimes goes weeks without her

needed treatment. Anger wells up in me, an uncomfortable feeling of hate. How can any human being not want to help others? It's the same anger I feel when I think about people who don't believe gays deserve the same rights that they have. It makes me physically sick. I don't see a distinction between that, or when women and minorities were gaining equal rights. Just as I don't understand how anyone can believe in a God that created existence and not want to take great care of the Earth and (all of) its people.

I'm sure my belief system would make a few people want to flip me off. Indeed, just then, we drive past another Romney sticker. It's a four passenger BMW driven by a middle aged man with glasses and white hair. I reflect on the article I read in the local paper, about Romney-Ryan supporters statistically being white, male, and older. I want to flip this guy off even more than the woman before him. I place my finger on the door and imagine myself rolling down the window. Poor guy, would he even know why I was doing it? Probably my own animal rights bumper stickers would give it away. Kaleb bought them for me and I put them on hoping it wouldn't make my neighbors stop talking to me. Though I don't really speak to them much since they got a giant flat screen television. Our stickers reference the time Romney drove twelve hours with a dog carrier strapped to the roof of a car, but, then again, I was dating a guy who illegally stickered police cars. Judgment... it's a slippery slope.

I decide I better not risk it and fold my middle finger tightly under my thumb. I try to self calm. I smooth out my navy blue skirt and straighten the white bow in my hair. I take a glance at myself in the rearview mirror. I don't look like I've ever flipped off anyone and maybe I haven't. It would be easier to stay calm if I could forget the racist emails and meme's I see online- offensive... not just to Obama, but Muslims everywhere.

"It's just how it is." I mumble to myself, forcing an 'I'm a well adjusted member of society and go along with the system' smile.

Kaleb thinks I must have said something smart or funny and grins back expectantly, waiting for my joke.

I start to tell him that for years I thought it was “flick” people off, only finding out it was “flip” people off, last week... but maybe one shouldn't do or say everything on one's mind.

We drive to the grocery store. I need vegetables and bananas. I ordered an Obama sticker but I'm not sure it will arrive in time for the election.

“I bet *this* is another Romney sticker.” Kaleb jokes, when a big grey truck with an extra cab and giant tires swerves dangerously close to us- impatient, as we walk toward the store. We move to the side before its tires plow us over. As it drives past, we see it... an *actual Romney sticker in their rear view window*. I shake my head in amusement and give Kaleb a pretend point by licking my fingertip and drawing in the air.

A jeep jets past and Kaleb yanks me safely out of the way. “Lunch hour traffic.” I justify, but he's gazing at the jeep as it slows to park. “And *that*...” he announces with flourish, “is pretty much the same thing...” his lips press together in a half smile and I'm confused. His smile would give Mona Lisa a run for her money.

“What?” I ask, feeling left out of his joke. The jeep doesn't even have a Romney sticker.

I gaze a little closer at the vehicle in question. It turns out it has a Texan sports team's sticker in the back window. So *that's* what he was referring to... *the handsome guy from Texas*, that I once had a crush on... when he and I were on a break. Mr. Texas liked the same team as the jeep owner, but Kaleb's real subtext demands how I could have liked anyone who was a Republican.

“That's not a Romney sticker...” I continue, still playing dumb. Kaleb doesn't answer and I'm thankful, but begin to feel a bit guilty. I decide to change tactics and pinch his arm- *to let him know that I know*, to indicate that I 'got' the joke that wasn't *really* a joke.

Personal politics are surely the most challenging of all.

