



Ambiguity Of Violence, by Robert Sapolsky

It is the ambiguity of violence, that we can pull a trigger as an act of hideous aggression or of self-sacrificing love, that is so challenging. As a result, violence will always be a part of the human experience that is profoundly hard to understand. The biologies of strong love and strong hate are similar in many ways, which is we don't actually hate aggression -- we hate the wrong kind of aggression but love it in the right context.

My wife and I were in the minivan once, our kids in the back, my wife driving. And this completely reckless driver cuts us off, almost causing an accident, and in a way that makes it clear that it wasn't distractedness on his part, just sheer selfishness.

My wife honks at him, and he flips us off. We're livid, incensed. *****-where's-the-cops-when-you-need-them, etc.

And suddenly my wife announces that we're going to follow him, make him a little nervous. I'm still furious, but this doesn't strike me as the most prudent thing in the world. Nonetheless, my wife starts trailing him, right on his rear.

After a few minutes the guy's driving evasively, but my wife's on him. Finally both cars stop at a red light, one that we know is a long one. Another car is stopped in front of the villain. He's not going anywhere.

Suddenly my wife grabs something from the front seat divider, opens her door, and says, "Now he's going to be sorry."

I rouse myself feebly "Uh, honey, do you really think this is such a good idea?" But she's out of the car, starts pounding on his window.

I hurry over just in time to hear my wife say, "If you could do something that mean to another person, you probably need this," in a venomous voice. She then flings something in the window. She returns to the car triumphant, just glorious.

"What did you throw in there!?" She's not talking yet. The light turns green, there's no one behind us, and we just sit there.

The thug's car starts to blink a very sensible turn indicator, makes a slow turn, and heads down a side street into the dark at, like, five miles an hour.

If it's possible for a car to look ashamed, this car was doing it.

"Honey, what did you throw in there, tell me?"

She allows herself a small, malicious grin. "A grape lollipop."

I was awed by her savage passive-aggressiveness "You're such a mean, awful human that something must have gone really wrong in your childhood, and maybe this lollipop will help correct that just a little."

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