

The Style Invitational

Week CXLIV: A Load of Bulwer



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

"On reflection, Angela perceived that her relationship with Tom had always been rocky, not quite a roller-coaster ride but more like when the toilet-paper roll gets a little squashed so it hangs crooked and every time you pull some off you can hear the rest going bumpity-bumpity in its holder until you go nuts and push it back into shape, a degree of annoyance that Angela had now almost attained."

This week's contest was suggested by John O'Byrne of Dublin. Above is the 2002 winner of the Bulwer-Lytton bad writing contest, a gem by Rephah Berg of Oakland, Calif. You can do worse, no? Give us the beginning of an even less competently written novel. Maximum 100 words. First-prize winner gets an antique Martha Washington plate (a real blue-hair special).

First runner-up wins the tacky but estimable Style Invitational Loser Pen. Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker. Send your entries via fax to 202-334-4312, or by e-mail to losers@washpost.com. U.S. mail entries are no longer accepted. Deadline is Monday, Nov. 4. All entries must include the week number of the contest and your name, postal address and telephone number. E-mail

entries must include the week number in the subject field. Contests will be judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published in four weeks. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's contest is by Chris Doyle of Forsyth, Mo.



A



B



C



D



E

Report from Week CXL

a contest in homage to the oversensitive, in which you were asked to explain why you are offended by any of these ostensibly benign cartoons. But first: tell us a joke involving the stupidity of the Czar. Send it in by this Tuesday. You might win a T-shirt, and everlasting fame. It can't be some old chestnut, it's got to be really funny, and he's got to seem REALLY stupid. Edgy is good.

◆ Second Runner-Up (Cartoon A): **When will we be able to portray women in the comics without calling undue attention to their perky breasts? What's next, a telltale bulge in Dagwood's pants?** (Jeff Brechlin, Potomac Falls)

◆ First Runner-Up (Cartoons D and E): **There is nothing funny about the existence of glass ceilings for women in the workplace, and certainly nothing funny about actually opaqing them with paint, for additional oppression.** (Carl Gerber, Annandale; Claire McManus, Potomac)

◆ And the winner of the six 1972 socialist pamphlets from Chile (Cartoon D): **Using a miniature hand-held steamroller to kill babies before collecting their blood in a bucket is fine, but it is insulting to suggest that such a workman would not be wearing the proper safety goggles. Union men are not all incompetent.** (Seth Brown, Williamstown, Mass.)

Honorable Mentions:

Cartoon A: My God, this woman is wearing nothing above the waist except a black choker and an open-front vest! Would you want your mother to race down the street like this? (J. Mat Schech, Colesville)

The graphic depiction of the relative amounts of flatulence emitted by butterflies vs. humans is utterly disgusting. (Jessica Lynne Mathews, Arlington)

How dare you make light of the fact that many of America's elderly are in such dire financial straits that they need to catch bugs for their dinner. (Bird Waring, New York; Karli Sakas, Sweet Briar, Va.)

By showing the woman using a net to catch butterflies, your newspaper is clearly implying that this method is preferable to the much more effective one involving assault rifles. (Charlton Heston, Hollywood) (Marc Leibert, New York)

Cartoon B: We must protect our endangered species! No more whale's-tail hats! (Joyce Rains, Bethesda; John Cook, Arlington)

Oh, so only a GUY would be dumb enough to check the burner temperature with his own hand? (Steve Fahey, Kensington; Selma Mathias, Harrisonburg, Va.)

Cartoon C: This endangers public health by showing a U.S. government employee driving an unsafe vehicle with no rearview mirror, no seat belts and, apparently, no windshield. Furthermore, he is driving with his eyes closed. What an appalling example for the nation's youth. (Dan Steinberg, Falls Church; Keith Waites, Frederick)

Your point is a thinly disguised jab at dedicated public servants: All postal workers are "well armed," is it? (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

It is an insult to Roman Catholics worldwide to place a letter carrier in the Popemobile, implying that the church had to sell it to settle lawsuits. (Nick Dierman, San Francisco; Jonathan Alen Marks, Alexandria)

Cartoon D: "Nose whistle" is a tragic affliction and should not be made fun of in a cartoon. (Sue Lin Chong, Washington)

"O Canada" must be sung, never whistled, during preparation of the ice rink. (Milo Sauer, Fairfax)

Cartoon E: This desk was obviously made from one solid piece of burled oak. With all the recycled material around today, why did yet another tree have to die to fill our gluttonous needs? (Judith Cottrill, New York)

Significantly, there are no 6s or 9s on the blackboard—an obvious allusion, through omission, to a well-known sexual practice. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

This is an appalling racial slur, suggesting that a black teacher would accept a bribe (an apple) to dismiss class early (it's only 2 o'clock) so she can read a book for her own amusement. (Nicholas Rosen, Arlington)

This picture is offensive because it implies that African American teachers should be working only in schools that have not had their flags replaced since, like, 1814. (Brady Holt, Fort Washington)

◆ And Last: All the Cartoons: **It is deeply offensive that all of these persons, if they live in Washington, are being taxed without their consent.** (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)



TELL ME ABOUT IT

TELL ME, From F1

she does this she will lose everything, including her already-strained relationships with my siblings. What am I supposed to do?
—Way Too Much Info in Baltimore

I agree, you have way too much information. Your mom should never have put you in the position of having to, essentially, lie to Dad for a year.

But as a neat bookend to your data surplus, you also have way too little. You say you tried to talk to your mom, but have you listened? The same facts could also support an alternative view of her actions. Have you considered how you would feel if your lifelong companion left the best of himself at work? Didn't even try to talk to you when he got home? Didn't even notice you were unhappy, lonely, trying hard not to scream? Would you be eager for 20, 30, 40 more years of that?

Whether this describes how your mom is feeling, I don't know—I'd have to ask her to find out. But so would you, and I don't get the sense that you have. I suspect you have been the one talking, challenging her decision to leave.

Yes, he's your father and you love him; Mom still might. But he's also her husband, and that's a private bond. Maybe she did try

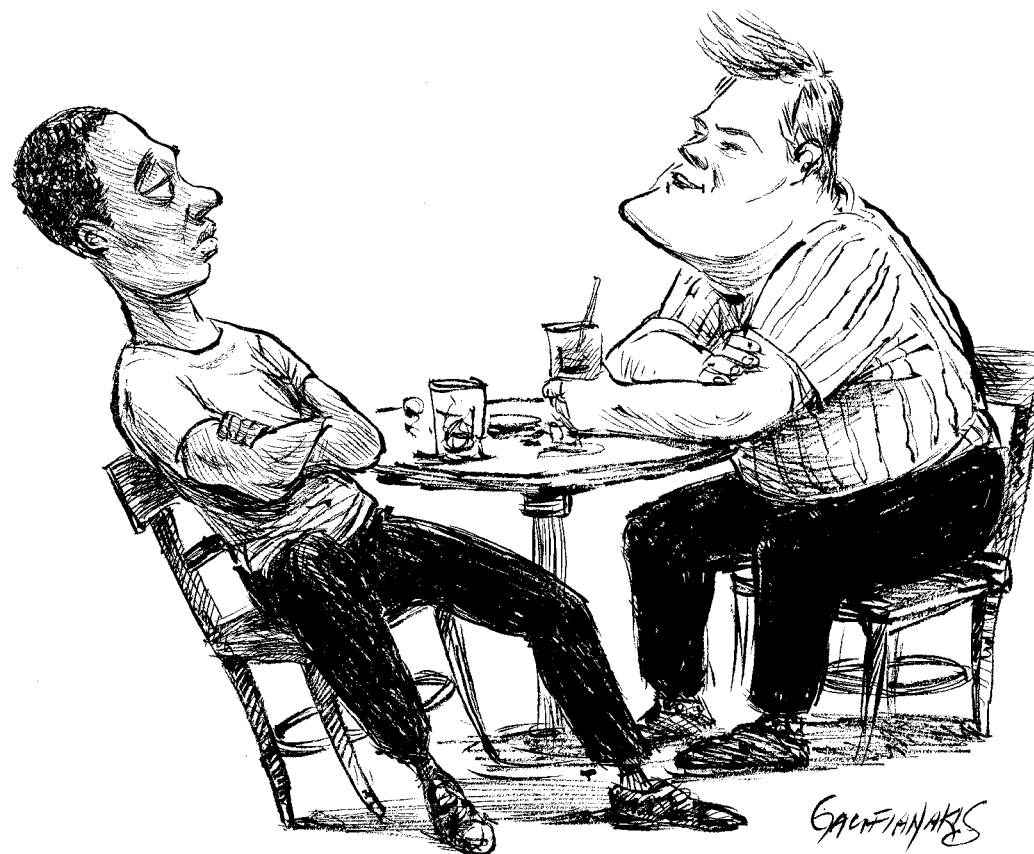
to strengthen it—i.e., truly feels she gave your father years of "opportunity to change"—and he simply didn't see, and that's why he'll be blindsided. Maybe, quietly, she's been taking one for the adolescent team all these years, compensating for his lack of intimacy, and now that you're grown, she's done.

Again, this is all just an alternate theory; I don't know your mom. I'm suggesting only that you know her, and your father, and their marriage, in as objective a way as you can, before you go taking sides.

Carolyn: Attended an April wedding with 300-plus guests. Bought and had store ship wedding present in March. No thank-you note yet. Is it impolite to ask if they received the gift?
—Los Angeles

Nope. Depending on what actually happened, it's either a polite way to notify a couple that one of their gifts was lost or mishandled, or a socially sanctioned way to ask if they were raised in a barn.

Write to Tell Me About It, Style, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071 or tellme@washpost.com, and join Carolyn's live discussion at noon Fridays at www.washingtonpost.com/liveonline



DON'T GET THEM ANYTHING, WAIT TWO MONTHS AFTER THE WEDDING, THEN ASK IF THEY LIKED THE CANDLESTICKS. TRUST ME.

BY NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Next Week: Mining Your P's and Q's