

The Style Invitational

Week 627: Per-Verse



Blessed are you, whose worthiness brings scope,
And doth make my heart go all kerplow.

Next week in this space you can gaze upon the shining summit of the tottering heap of 706 limericks submitted for Week 624. Not only is each winner clever and funny, but each of them also manages to rhyme. Now, this may not seem remarkable to you. That is because you, unlike the Empress, did not spend a week wading through such paired line endings as “deafening” and “happening,” or “usual” and “biannual.” But what to do about this epidemic of tin-ear? The answer arrived quickly, and coincidentally. Amy Lago, the comics editor of the Washington Post Writers Group, was noodling around with a verse form she’d invented: the egregious almost-rhyme. In a back-and-forth e-mail poetry jam with Washington Post Magazine humor columnist Gene Weingarten, the form was refined: (He: *This rhyme form is really hilarious; / If poems are steak, these are Cheerios. / I think that we must / Continue this joust / Till we’ve built up an oeuvre that’s serious.* She: *My reply, sir, a very loud “ouch!” / I agree that you’ve got the touch. / You’re good at this mischief, / But bow to your mistress. / Just admit you’re not all that tough.*)

This week’s contest: Write a limerick or other short poem with comically awful rhyming. This is a little tricky, because it can’t just be bad; it has to be so awful it’s funny, as in the examples above. Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up receives the adorable “Alfie” the Liver Coloring Book, produced by the American Liver Foundation and donated by Russell Beland of Springfield and his daughter, Blythe Marshall of Annandale. It features a roughly triangular smiling guy with skinny arms and legs, depicting a day in the life of a liver. Unfortunately, Crayola does not issue a crayon in Liver; you’ll have to make do with, perhaps, Manatee.

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or, if you really have to, by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Sept. 19. Results will be published Oct. 9. Put “Week 627” in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Entries are 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. 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.

Report from Week 623, in which we asked you to come up with useful (or comically useless) phrases to serve as mnemonics: About half of you offered up one for the presidential line of succession, which was our example four weeks ago. It seems that it’s awfully hard to come up with funny, clever sentences of 18 words in which the first and last words begin with V. Loser Roy Ashley wins a T-shirt for a clever entry containing a French word that was deemed un-Postworthy by someone more mature than the Empress.

♦ **Second runner-up:** *Terror alert levels (Red: Severe; Orange: High; Yellow: Elevated; Blue: Guarded; Green: Low): Run screaming outdoors, hide yourself; even better: get guns loaded.* (Dan Seidman, Watertown, Mass.)

♦ **First runner-up, the winner of the tequila lollipop with worm, plus the ugly green squeeze change purse:** *The first digits of pi (3.14159265358979323 . . .), with the digits corresponding to the number of letters per word: Pie! I chew a piece. Instantly my throat shuts. Gag, choke — Heimlich! Upchucked quickly. Ambulance can go now . . .* (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)

♦ **And the winner of the Inker:** *Abbreviations in the periodic table Rows 2 through 6 (Li, Be, B, C, N, O, F, Ne; Na, Mg, Al, Si, P, S, Cl, Ar; K, Ca, Sc, Ti, V, Cr, Mn, Fe, Co, Ni, Cu, Zn, Ga, Ge, As, Se, Br, Kr; Rb, Sr, Y, Zr, Nb, Mo, Tc, Ru, Rh, Pd, Ag, Cd, In, Sn, Sb, Te, I, Xe; Cs, Ba, La, Hf, Ta, W, Re, Os, Ir, Pt, Au, Hg, Tl, Pb, Bi, Po, At, Rn): Lonesome Bill “Bubba” Clinton’s night off. Forebodings? None. Naughty Monica arrives. She proffers sex. Clinton accepts. Ken comes snooping. Tripp’s vigilant, cajoles Monica for Clinton news. Clinton’s zapped, gets grilled about stain by Ken. Rumors swell. Young (zaftig now) Monica talks readily. Report’s published, and Clinton’s indicted. Starr’s sensational tome is X-rated. Clinton’s beleaguered. Loses House trial. Washington’s riveted. Onto impeachment proceedings. Acquittal! How to portray Bill’s presidency? A riot!* (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

♦ **Honorable Mentions:**
The U.S. presidents in order: Why aren’t just, moral men attracting judicious voters? Historically, the parties tried for plurality by listing jobs, growth, honest government as candidates’ highest concerns. More recently, though, White House campaigns have refined their election knowhow: Just need Fox channel running biased coverage — Bingo! (Elwood Fitzner, Valley City, N.D.)

“The Magnificent Seven” actors (McQueen, Brynner, Coburn, Bronson, Vaughn, Dexter, Buchholz): Men being cowboys become very dead bodies. (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

Parts of the brain (Cerebrum, Diencephalon, Midbrain, Pons, Medulla oblongata, Cerebellum): Celine Dion music? Pretty much ca-ca. (Chris Doyle)

Stations on Metrorail’s Yellow Line (Huntington, Eisenhower, King, Braddock, Reagan National, Crystal City, Pentagon City, Pentagon, L’Enfant, Archives, Gallery, Mount Vernon): Here, escalators keep breaking routinely; noisy crowded cars perpetually cram passengers like a giant moving van. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Why we went to war in Iraq: Geopolitics, Empire-building, Oil, Regime change, Getting even, Electioneering, Weapons of mass destruction, Big business, U.N. failure, Stopping terrorists, Hubris. (Steve Fahey, Kensington)

Layers of the epidermis (Corneum, Lucidum, Granulosum, Spinosum, Basele): Cher likes getting skin Botoxed. (Chris Doyle)

The Seven Dwarfs (Dopey, Doc, Happy, Sleepy, Sneezzy, Bashful, Grumpy): Diminutive dudes halt scoundrel’s secretive bedtime gambit. (Rick Haynes, Potomac)

The major parties’ female candidates for president or vice president in order chronologically, alphabetically and by number of votes received: Ferraro. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Airflow passages (Mouth, Pharynx, Larynx, Trachea): Monica pauses . . . “Let’s talk.” (Chris Doyle)

Indubitably, It Incorporates Ideas Including Individualistic Ideological Values, Virtue, Verities Interminable, and Valuable Insights Into Vexing Issues. (Indigenous and Involuntarily Indentured eXplicitly eXcluded.) — Mnemonic for the amendments in the Bill of Rights: I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX and X. (Steven J. Allen, Manassas)

Presidential line of succession, from Vice president down to Veterans affairs secretary: Very harsh sunlight started to deplete Albert’s harvests; ingeniously, Albert created levitating harvest helio-reflectors that evenly enriched vegetation. (Perry Proctor, Upper Marlboro)

And Last: *The top five all-time Style Invitational Losers (Beland, Witte, Smith, Doyle, Hart): Beats working, say dorky hacks.* (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

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MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

An Accounting of Etiquette

Why would people want to give etiquette control over their money?

Half the time they don’t even trust etiquette to rule on etiquette. Miss Manners tries not to take this personally, but many people simply cannot believe that modern etiquette would insist that they perform duties they don’t feel like doing. Keep their social engagements, for example? What if, when the time comes, they feel like doing something else?

Yet when it comes to forking over their money, it seems that etiquette is considered an even greater authority than those attempting to get hold of their money.

First the importuned listen to the hands-out crowd: children telling their parents that they owe them expensive weddings, parents telling their children that they owe them expensive anniversary parties, social connections declaring what their guests owe them in the way of contributions and presents, service people declaring what their clients owe them in the way of tips.

On their way to bankruptcy, they appeal for an etiquette judgment. Parents who are living on Social Security ask if it is true, as their daughter the lawyer tells them, that etiquette expects them to pay for her second dream wedding. Restaurant-goers who had thought they were meeting expectations with 15 percent tips and being generous when they tipped 20 percent want to know if it is true that 25 percent is now expected.

Guests ask what they are expected to spend on donations and presents: What is the going price for a graduation? How much do they owe for a death? Is it true that they are expected to give the equivalent of what is spent on the food and drink they consume at an event? Those who have given the same person an engagement present, three shower presents, a wedding present, two baby shower presents and a baby present want to know what more is expected of them before they can stop.

Miss Manners cannot say what people’s financial expectations are, except that they seem to be limitless. She can say that etiquette should not be expected to keep a price list of social payoffs.

The only financial demand it makes is that people pay their own bills (including paying for service, even though that takes the form of supposed-

ly voluntary tips) and stop making outrageous financial demands on their friends and relations. Any such demand made of a guest is an affront to the concept of hospitality. Burdensome financial demands made within families violate the family spirit, which is to look out for the interests of one another.

Personal life should not be run like a business. Those involved in giving a wedding should decide among themselves who is willing and able to pay for what and budget accordingly. The value of presents lies in the choice, as well as the price, but donors must decide what they want to spend, according to their means, the closeness of the relationship and the importance of the occasion.

If they are fed up with giving, they are doubtless fed up with the recipients. For the price of a stamp, they can send their congratulations and their regrets. Miss Manners cannot offer a better bargain than that.

Dear Miss Manners:

Can you assist with some advice for managing longer skirts, especially on stairs? I have a raincoat that I find especially difficult to maneuver during my fraught commute.

What you need is a skirt lifter. Neither a pervert nor a trainbearer, this is a Victorian gadget with a hook to suspend it from the belt and a clamp to lift long skirts above what was left in the streets by those charming horse-drawn carriages.

As skirt lifters are scarce and expensive, Miss Manners is happy to be able to tell you that it is also correct to use the hands. You hold them straight down your sides, and each of them gathers a handful of material and then moves upward, a rather graceful gesture. Of course you need your hands free to do this, so you will have to hang your other stuff — purse, briefcase, telephone, umbrella — elsewhere on your body.

Feeling incorrect? E-mail your etiquette questions to Miss Manners (who is distraught that she cannot reply personally) at MissManners@unitedmedia.com or mail to United Media, 200 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

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ASK AMY

Dear Amy:

My wife suffered a massive heart attack a few months ago. She died way too young.

I’m raising two boys on my own now. Everything has changed.

We’re all seeing individual counselors. I also hit a widow/widowers group twice a month for support.

Still, sometimes I just get so down that I cry (a lot).

My co-workers and family just do not understand what we are going through. I try to tell them to lay off, but they keep telling me and my kids to “just get over her.”

I’m at the point that I hesitate to answer or return their phone calls.

Do you have any advice for me to get my family and friends off my back?

It’s still too soon for us to let my wife and their mom go. This may take years.

Mark in Illinois

Your grief, sadness and pain are evident in this letter. It is obvious that you are hurting terribly. I am so sorry for this huge and sudden loss to you and your family.

However, I can’t help but wonder if your grief is making you misinterpret people.

I find it almost impossible to believe that your co-workers and family are urging you and your boys to “just get over” your wife. I have a feeling that they are perhaps trying to help you by urging you to get on with your lives, which is not the same thing.

You don’t “just get over” a beloved wife and mother. You do, however, need to move through your grief and continue to live, even in an extremely altered state — because you don’t have a choice.

It is understandable for you to get sad and cry. It is good for your boys to see that all of you can continue to express your sadness. However, it’s not good for your boys to see you depressed, crying and rejecting friends and family. Of course it is frustrating that others can’t understand the depths of your grief, but it is necessary for you to demonstrate to your boys that you are somewhat in control of your anger and sadness.

Please take everything that you have men-

tioned here to your therapist and your grief support groups. Describe exactly how you are processing your grief — you may be clinically depressed and you should be evaluated for this debilitating illness. Any treatment for depression wouldn’t take your grief away, but it might take the edge off and enable you to get through the day and gain a wider perspective.

Moving through grief and getting on with your life do not mean that you are forgetting your wife or “getting over” her. It means that you are honoring her memory by learning how to live again.

A book that you might find helpful is, “When a Man Faces Grief/A Man You Know is Grieving,” by Thomas R. Golden and James E. Miller (Willowgreen Publishing, \$6.95 paper). I hope that you will continue to search for ways to examine your grief in order to understand it.

Dear Amy:

Having had cancer about 20 years ago, I wanted to share my experience with kindness.

Often I spent long, miserable days alone at home during all my surgeries and radiation treatments.

Besides the love and support from family and friends, what gave me a great morale boost was that every day, one, two or more people from where I worked would bring lunch and eat with me.

They had a calendar at work where my co-workers signed up. There never was a day that at least one didn’t show up. The food and the companionship were the best therapy and helped motivate me to recover and get back to work with these great people.

I’m still grateful.

Gene Bowen

For many of us, our co-workers are also our friends and de facto family. I’m happy to help you to express your gratitude to these thoughtful people.

Write to Amy Dickinson at askamy@tribune.com or Ask Amy, Chicago Tribune, TT500, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611.

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BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

N-S vulnerable			
NORTH			
♠	A Q 7 2		
♥	K 7 4		
♦	J 7 5 2		
♣	10 5		
EAST			
♠	9 8 4 3		
♥	10 8 6 2		
♦	K 9 3		
♣	Q 9		
SOUTH (D)			
♠	K 6 5		
♥	A Q 5 3		
♦	A 6		
♣	A 6 4 3		

The bidding:

South	West	North	East
1 NT	Pass	2 ♣	Pass
2 ♥	Pass	3 NT	All Pass

Opening lead: ♣ 7

“My regular partner’s defense is unbearable,” a player told us in the club lounge.

Cy the Cynic, who has had dozens of “regular” partnerships and has no patience with partner-bashers, had a fitting retort: “In that case,” said Cy, “maybe you’re the bear.”

Today’s deal had caused the trouble. West, the complainer, led a club against 3NT, and East played the queen. South took the ace, huddled and returned a club.

“I took the jack and then the king,” West told us, “and my partner threw a spade, giving South four spade tricks and his contract: After I ran the clubs, South had nine tricks.

“My partner must keep ‘parity.’ He must keep four spades since dummy has four, and four hearts since South bid hearts. His spade discard was horrible.”

Who erred?

Bear with me: Analysis doesn’t bear out West’s argument. East didn’t bear up well, but if West had been bearing down, he’d have saved his partner. When South invited West to cash his club tricks, it could only mean that South had eight tricks and hoped to set up a squeeze.

When West ran the clubs, East could throw three diamonds safely, but when South won the next trick, he’d cash the ace of diamonds, forcing East to discard from a major suit and concede the ninth trick. (Actually, the defenders were unlikely to prevail even after West took his third club trick.)

West should refuse to help South: When West wins a club at Trick Two, he should shift, perhaps to a diamond. South will have no chance.

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