

The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 694: Hopelessly Ever After



BY BOB STAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST, WITH APOLOGIES TO CLEMENT HURD

The struggle between parent and child [is] . . . in "Goodnight Moon" only implicit. Indeed, there's no parent on the scene. . . . Time moves forward, and the little bunny doesn't stand a chance. Parent and child are, in this way, brought together, on tragic terms. You don't want to go to sleep. I don't want to die. But we both have to."

These heartwarming reflections on the world's sweetest bedtime story were offered up by Elizabeth Kolbert in the Dec. 4 New Yorker, and shared with us by Awfully Eager to Share Loser Peter Metrinko. We whisper: Hush, woman! **This week: Offer up a gloomy interpretation of any unglorious piece of writing.** Seventy-five words max but you can write much shorter as well.

Winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up gets the book "The Ultimate Guide to Prank University," a handy manual for such ingeniously droll practical jokes as Super Soaker Sink, Itchy Undies, and Filling Your Sleeping Roommate's Shoes With Foreign Liquids.

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable Mentions (or whatever they're called that week) 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 by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Tuesday, Jan. 2. Put "Week 694" 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. Contests 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. Results will be published Jan. 21. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. This week's Honorable Mentions name is by Bruce Alter of Fairfax Station.

REPORT FROM WEEK 690

In which we asked you to transport a comic strip character to another time or place. Many people had Sarge and Beetle not asking and not telling as they ran off to Provincetown together.

- 1** The gang from "B.C." is moved to A.D., finally allowing the cartoonist to explore Christian religious themes. (Mike Fransella, Arlington)
- 2** the winner of the ceramic "smoking baby"; "Zits": Jeremy Duncan and his mom, who never wondered why Jeremy's best friend, Hector, looks exactly like Dr. Duncan, discover that Hector is Jeremy's half brother. Apparently the good doctor, who is also Hector's mom's dentist, filled the wrong cavity. (Rob Kloak, Springfield)
- 3** Lucy is busted by state medical authorities for practicing psychiatry without a license after a patient tried to submit an insurance claim for 5 cents. (Jon Milstein, Falls Church)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

CATHY ON MARS (Martin Bancroft, Rochester)

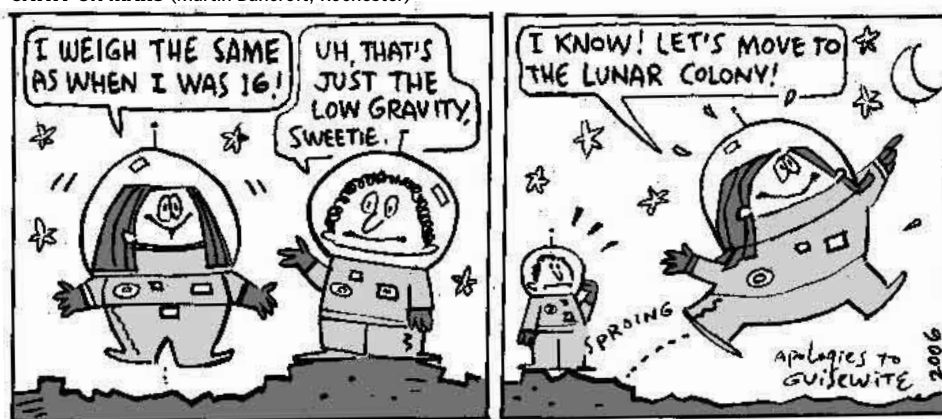


ILLUSTRATION BY BOB STAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

MUTTS

"Hagar the Horrible": Hagar has been time-traveling for years, planting old Norse relics in the Canadian Maritimes to be "discovered" by archaeologists. So anyone who tells you the Vikings reached America before Columbus has fallen for a wacky cartoon prank! (This message brought to you by the Sons of Italy organization) (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Spider-Man turns 85 and has to wear Wrist-Depends. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

"For Better or for Worse": Now working in the porn industry, April traces her loss of self-esteem to the day she decided to drown Farley. (Dave Kelsey, Fairfax)

Tragedy struck Sacramento tonight as newly elected Governor of California Artur was attacked and killed by a man police have identified as a childhood acquaintance, world-renowned chess grandmaster "Big" Nate. (Bruce Alter, Fairfax Station)

1940: Mary Worth, a high school sophomore, is lecturing a student about smoking in the girls' lavatory. One girl whispers to two others: "You two grab her legs, and I'll stick Miss Goody Two Shoes' head in the toilet." (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

An aged Snoopy chokes to death on a Red Baron frozen pizza; ironically, he has no life insurance. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

"Blondie" time-warped, finally, into the actual 21st century; Dagwood makes himself a plate of four-pound tapas. (Maja Keech, New Carrollton)

"He was here every day — snow, rain, heat, gloom of night," recalled Dagwood Bumstead,

81, who lives on Beasley's last route. "In fact, I bumped into him just this morning. And he never spoke of any frustrations at work." (Bob Dalton, Arlington)

Cath-sandra, Underappreciated Athenian Prophetess: The Oracle of Delphi: "It is the will of Zeus that the sons of Troy will be slaughtered, their bones gnawed upon by dogs — oh, and this year's swimwear will be French-cut." Cath-sandra (running through streets, tunic flying and laurel wreath askew): AAAAACK!! (Mary Ann Henningsen, Hayward, Calif.)

"Curtis": Undercover agents Derrick and Orion arrest Gunther for running a bookmaking operation from his barbershop. (Roy Ashley, Washington)

"Dennis the Menace," 2036: Under hypnosis, an aging Courtney Love reveals: "That dumb ol' Dennis would never have tea with me. Too prissy, huh? Yeah, what the @\$ does he think now?" (Mary Ann Henningsen)

Still extremely short and no less annoying, a middle-aged Dennis the Menace earns the stinging wrath of his home town when he buys the local football team and runs it straight into the ground. (Tom Galgano, Bowie)

Russian Military Lab: Dilbert: How do I get rid of this leftover polonium? Walski: I throw mine into the fish tank at that sushi restaurant. (Martin Bancroft)

"The Family Circus": With an irrational fear that dead relatives are always watching her, 29-year-old Dolly Keane remains a virgin. (Kevin Dopart)

"For Better or for Worse": Through five panels, Mom patiently gets the kids dressed for playing in the snow, struggling with snowsuits, boots, hats, mittens — and of course one has to go to the bathroom, so she has to dress them all over again. Then in the last panel, they stand on the porch before the freshly fallen snow and stare at the mushroom cloud forming over the nearby city. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

Baghdad, circa 820: Frank: I hear that Al-Khwarizmi the mathematician is using zeros! Ernest: Yes, aught-ism runs in his family! (Peter Metrinko)

Garfield grows so fat that he takes up the whole panel, not allowing any other characters or even dialogue to appear. This is generally seen as an improvement. (Art Grinath)

"Peanuts": The Washington Nationals hire Charlie Brown, 65, as general manager, stating: "He's worked with teams composed of nothing more than a bunch of no-talent kids, a dog and a whining girl — which makes him perfect for us." (Drew Bennett, Alexandria)

Zippy moves to 1950s France to become a playwright but is lambasted by critics as "too accessible. . . a simplistic sellout to the masses." He tries to atone by writing a two-person "Oresteia" for Jerry Lewis and a rhinoceros, but by then his reputation is in tatters, and all is lost. In a final kiss-off protest, he bathes. (Brendan Beary)

Next Week: Haven't Got a Clue, or Just Try to Cross Us

Fruitcake: The Sublime and the Brickulous

FRUITCAKE, From D1

(Maraschinos? they respond, with hauteur and outrage. Banish the thought! Nearly all of America's fruitcake fanatics — and they are out there, dotted across the country, although their numbers are nowhere near as densely packed as the fruits in their finest cakes — would get all stirred up at the comparison: No artificial flavors, no neon colors in these concoctions. The analogy crumbles like a Walgreens fruitcake undergoing the knife.)

The Hyde sisters say theirs is a partnership that keeps alive a family tradition, a top-secret recipe that goes back six generations. They still make their cakes in the old baby bathtub used by their mother and grandmother.

To the rest of the fruitcake-eschewing world, though, theirs seems more like a partnership in a Christmas crime.

But when you go to Trader Joe's and they're all out of pecan halves and filberts? That could just be the work of the fruitcake coven. We'll never know for sure.

Theresa Slowik, a Capitol Hill denizen, stocked up on her ingredients before Thanksgiving for this year's Christmas confection. Hers involves apricots, ginger, cherries, figs, raisins, currants, lemon and orange peel, pineapple and frequent baptisms with brandy.

"My in-laws are coming," explains this 50-something woman who works for the Smithsonian American Art Museum. "This has alcohol in it. They're going to be here for two weeks."

Yes, there are definite spiked-punchy possibilities with fruitcake. There are, though, even more punch-line possibilities. Eavesdrop on foodie chat groups online, and you'll hear doubters who mention fruitcake only to giggle about the fruitcakes who love them. Here and there is the spirited defense from a fruitcake missionary. "Damsel" speaks up on their behalf, proclaiming: "My mom made wonderful fruitcake. I think it's like liver or Miracle Whip. Either you love it or you hate it."

Responds "Serene": "If fruitcake is like liver or Miracle Whip, you're doing it wrong."

And though CoffeeCakes.com may be selling several kinds of fruitcakes, including a type made by monks — "and one thing I can say about the monks' is," says the company's VP of operations, Diane Okunewick, "they've got good booze" — the online company isn't selling a lot of them.

And they can't compare to the company's namesake coffeekakes. "We sell thousands of our coffeekakes," gushes Okunewick. "We get trucks weekly of our coffeekakes." But fruitcakes? Maybe they'll sell 300, and many of those will be, Okunewick says, "gag gifts."

No respect. The poor fruitcake gets no respect. And in Manitou Springs, Colo.,



BY SUSAN BIDDLE — THE WASHINGTON POST

These treasures from the old family recipe of Dail Day Hyde, right, and her sister Laine Hyde are teeming with nuts, fruit and Bacardi.

home of next year's 12th annual Great Fruitcake Toss, it gets even less.

"Eat it? I'd rather shoot it," says Joe Carberry, one of the four Boeing GPS engineers who make up Team Omega's Jack Taylor, "and we had to fight a dog for it."

"We're pretty efficient at disposing of fruitcake," Carberry says, "really far, far away."

Dail Day Hyde understands the impulse. Store-bought fruitcakes are "commercial," she says. "Like a candied fruit in a strong glue." She keeps in her desk drawer an old Edward Gorey Christmas card of people lined up on a frozen lake, waiting to drop their fruitcake into a hole in the ice.

But her Hyde Family Old English Fruitcake is a far superior sweetmeat: It is powerful and rich — each one-pound loaf is the size of a small banana bread and packs a whopping 3,600 calories; it delicate that, in certain bites, you can taste the individual seeds of the figs.

"I have had people well up in tears," she says, "saying, 'I never thought I'd try this again. My grandma used to make this.'"

For fruitcake really is about the power of memory. Jennifer Ann Mulholland Ri-

dout is a Texarkana, Tex., pathologist who may be up to her elbows this season in James Beard's Mother's Black Fruitcake, but, she says, "I hated fruitcakes when I was young. Fruitcakes were horrible. They were medicinal."

They were to be disdained, until the day when Ridout was about 10 years old, and her Italian grandmother's sideboard, "a massive thing of tiger oak," arrived at her South Texas home. Impressed and entranced, Ridout started tugging on the big crystal knobs of the sideboard's drawers and cabinets, until she opened one and discovered "the fabulously complex scent of sherry and candied fruit."

It was where her grandmother, Teresa Torzillo Messina, had kept her fruitcakes.

Now keep in mind, Ridout says, that this was in the early 1960s. Her grandmother had died in 1934. There had been no fruitcakes stored in there for "many, many years."

"It was almost as if," she continues, "this tiny little woman, whom I had never known, had penned a love letter to grandchildren she would never know — and that she had chosen to do it with fruitcake."

BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

South dealer

Both sides vulnerable

NORTH

♠ 9 4 3
♥ A 5
♦ K Q J 9 6
♣ J 8 5

WEST

♠ 10 8 7 2
♥ J 9 6 2
♦ 8 4
♣ 9 6 3

EAST

♠ A 6 5
♥ K 10 4
♦ A 7 2
♣ Q 10 4 2

SOUTH

♠ K Q J
♥ Q 8 7 3
♦ 10 5 3
♣ A K 7

The bidding:

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

Opening lead: ♠ 2

Unlucky Louie dropped in at the club, having attended a Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at his church.

"It's a lovely narrative," he told us, "about the angels, the shepherds and three wise men."

"Three wise women would have been more effective," sniffed Wendy, our club's feminist.

"Of course," growled Cy the Cynic. "They'd have gotten to Bethlehem early, cleaned the stable, brought practical gifts and delivered the baby."

"And made a casserole," Wendy added.

I don't know whether Wendy makes a good casserole, but she made today's 3NT when it looked as if her goose was cooked. West led the deuce of spades, won by East's ace, and as I was wondering whether East would return a spade or try a club shift, he led the king of hearts. Since East had 13 points, he knew West had next to none: The defenders' best chance was to prevent declarer from using the long diamonds.

It looked like a killing defense since dummy's entry to the diamonds was threatened. Wendy pondered and played a low heart from both hands. She won the next heart with the ace and led the king and then the queen of diamonds. East played low.

The diamonds seemed to be dead, but Wendy took two high spades, the queen of hearts and the ace of clubs. She then led her last diamond, and East had to win and lead a club. Wendy played low from her hand and took the rest when West could only produce the nine.

Cy, Louie, Wendy and I wish a holiday season of joy and peace to all my readers.

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