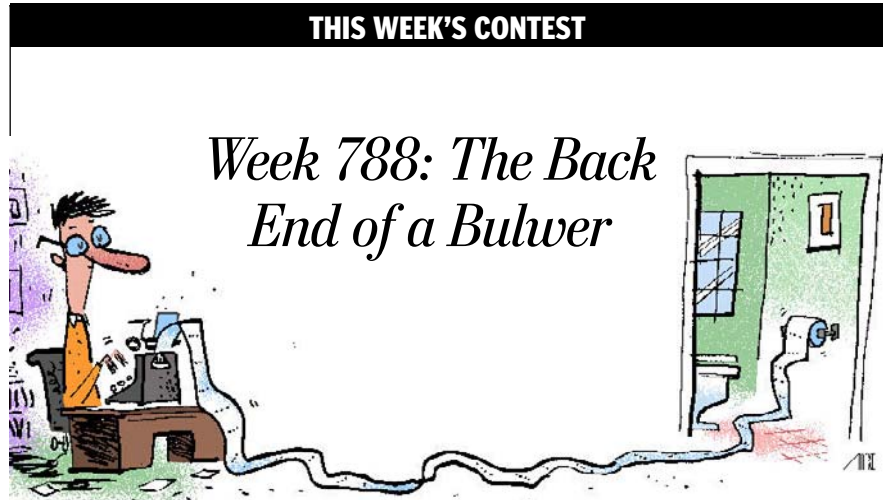


The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



Week 788: The Back End of a Bulwer

BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

In the pitch black, James pondered his inescapable fate, plummeting to the bottom of an elevator shaft sans elevator, with a sense of calm, knowing that despite the lack of any reprise, the author had already sold the movie rights to the sequel.

This year the annual Bulwer-Lytton contest — for a badly written opening to a novel — was won by a Garrison Spik of the District. The Invitational ripped off this contest directly back in 2002, and since then several readers, most notably rookie Loser Marc Boysworth of Burke (whose example is above), have suggested the obvious twist. **This week: Give us a comically terrible ending of a novel.** Seventy-five words tops, but brevity in the name of wit will not be scorned.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a car antenna ornament of "Booger Boy," a spike-haired kid picking his nose, donated by 399-time Loser Kevin Dopart. What a lovely complement to a few Loser Magnets stuck to a trunk lid.

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable Mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. First Offenders get a smelly tree-shaped air freshener (Fir Stink for their First Inker). 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 Monday, Nov. 3. Put "Week 788" 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 Nov. 22. 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 results is by Mike Ostapiej; this week's Honorable Mentions name is by John O'Byrne.

REPORT FROM WEEK 784 in which we sought proverbs for the 21st century, either updates of classic maxims or brand-new nuggets of wisdom. Just after we announced this contest, the market collapsed.

- 4** A man who wears suits double-breasted in woman's breasts has never rested. (Mike Ostapiej, Tracy, Calif.)
- 3** If you put lipstick on a pit bull, prepare to be bitten. (Bruce Alter, Fairfax Station)
- 2** the winner of the blinking, noisy frog and dolphin pens: Don't cry over spilt milk. Unless it spilt on your BlackBerry. (Brian Cohen, Potomac)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

If you are in financial stew, Think "What would Warren Buffett do?" But if your stocks are stone-cold dead, Take Jimmy Buffett's lead instead. (Mike Dailey, Centreville)

A FEW MORE GRINS OF TRUTH: HONORABLE MENTIONS

If you are in the public spotlight, try not to look like Tina Fey. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

A download a day brings the RIAA. (Josh Feldblyum, Philadelphia)

Do not dwell in too big a house, or you will soon be lying down in green pastures. (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it's probably Gilbert Gottfried. (Bryan Crain, Modesto, Calif.)

A penny saved is better than a penny invested. (Rick Haynes, Potomac)

LOL & all LOL 2; cry & u cry solo. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

Better to light a candle than curse that #@\$! end table my wife HAD to get that is totally out of place in the living room that I hit my calf on EVERY time I pass it on the way to the bathroom in the middle of the night. (Marc Boysworth, Burke)

Five hundred thirty-five fools and my money are soon united. (Michael Fransella, Arlington)

Delete every cookie To hide online nooky. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

There's no free lunch in Washington — unless you can eat it with toothpicks. (Kevin Dopart)

The quickest way to drive your friends and colleagues up a wall: When answering an e-mail, always use "Reply to All." (Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

You'll have to work till you're 83 If all your stock is in AIG. (Mike Dailey)

When gridlocked in traffic, and forced there to linger, De-stress and give rest to your poor middle finger. (Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.)

If you can read and think and spell, The daily Post will serve you well. If you can't spell or think or read, Perhaps a blog is more your speed. (Brendan Beary)

Be moderate in all your urges; Let your binges match your purges. (Brendan Beary)

Bars and bras both beckon guys When their cups are supersize. (Kevin Dopart)

Never put off till later what you can BlackBerry from your bathroom now. (Kevin Dopart)

Don't obsess over your shortcomings; that's your mate's job. (Bob Reichenbach, Philadelphia, a First Offender)

May we never miss W. (G. Smith, New York)

"American Idol" idles Americans. (Mike Ostapiej)

Foolish are you, male or female, If you reply to Nigerian e-mail. (Andrea Kelly, Brookeville)

Make not a password of simple design Lest your account balance transfers to mine. (Andrea Kelly)

When you lie down with dogs, make sure there are no photographers nearby. (Chuck Smith)

Congressmen are known by the companies that keep them. (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

If you push the envelope, sometimes things get sticky. (Chuck Smith)

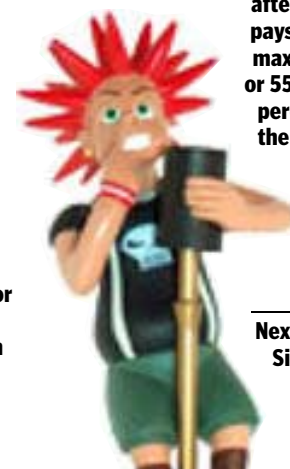
If booze you use for life's escapes, the dawn will bring the wrath of grapes. (Stephen Gold, Glasgow, Scotland)

Honor thy mother, her boyfriend, thy father and his third wife. That second wife was just nuts — forget about her. (Jon Graft, Centreville)

It matters not if you win or lose: It's endorsements, baby! (Cy Gardner, Arlington)

The meek shall inherit the earth, after the executor of the estate pays an estate tax equal to a maximum of 45 percent (in 2008, or 55 percent in 2011 plus a 5 percent bubble in some cases) of the amount by which the taxable estate (including the earth) exceeds the applicable exclusion amount within nine months of the date of death . . . (Jon Graft, Esq.)

Next Week: The Ballad Box, or I Sing the Body Electorate



Michelle Obama, on Sure Footing on the Trail

MICHELLE, From CI

trail for 48 hours to visit Madelyn Dunham, the grandmother he calls "Toot." At a telephone bank here, Obama told a potential supporter that Dunham "is sick and may not be with us much longer."

Dunham did much to raise Barack Obama, born to an 18-year-old mother with a certain wanderlust. He credits Dunham with sacrificing for his upbringing and imparting a hard-scramble Midwestern sensibility grounded in her Kansas roots.

"He said the other night, 'You

know, I got my toughness from Toot,'" Obama told the crowd in Columbus. "Because she taught him with her quiet confidence and that love and support that he could do anything," she said.

In Akron, she mentioned a conversation with a voter who described her own problems — she went blind, she lost a son, her grandson went to war, her husband left her — and then told Michelle that she is praying for Barack's grandmother.

"Now that's America right there," Obama said. "On behalf of my fami-

ly, thank you. We will be fine."

Obama, who has been juggling roles at home and on the road since the campaign began nearly 21 months ago, recently said she enjoys campaigning more than she expected. Yet as she has traveled the country, the cheers of supporters have been mixed with challenges to her patriotism from critics, including jabs from Cindy McCain and Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin.

It was in Wisconsin in February that Obama said, "For the first time in my adult life, I am really proud of

my country. Not just because Barack is doing well, but because I think people are hungry for change." She explained later that, as someone who had felt disconnected from politics, she was pleased to see "people rolling up their sleeves in a way that I haven't seen, and really trying to figure this out."

Supporters said they understood, but the damage was done. McCain took the opportunity to declare, "Yes, I have always been proud of my country." Palin delivered a similar slam, spawning a T-shirt design that proclaims, "Always Proud."

Criticism became farce when a Fox News anchor asked whether the Obamas' congratulatory fist-bumping the night he clinched the Democratic nomination was a "terrorist fist bump."

The anti-American narrative gained enough traction that the campaign felt forced to respond.

In Fort Wayne, Ind., last week, campaign aides placed Michelle Obama in front of no fewer than four American flags. A supporter, just before he led the crowd in the Pledge of Allegiance, said of the aspiring first couple, "We have two great patriots who love this country."

In the campaign's final weeks, Michelle Obama marches forward. She spends two to four days on the road each week, limiting her time away from their two daughters, whom she calls "the reason I breathe every day." Her staff tries to schedule her first speaking event in the middle of the day, to give her time to get the girls dressed, fed and off to school before she catches her small chartered jet.

If she spends a night on the road, Obama tries to get home before dinner the next day. Most weekends, she is home, but one recent weekend, the girls stayed with one of her close friends, Yvonne Davila, who has daughters about the same ages as Malia, 10, and Sasha, 7.

"We are co-parenting our children. Her kids have toothbrushes at my house," says Davila, who owns a marketing company and lives 10 minutes from the Obamas' home in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood. "I pick up the kids for ballet and soccer and we do shopping sprees. I took all the kids shopping last weekend."

On Thursday, the Obama girls went to Davila's house to make Halloween cookies and cupcakes. On Friday, Davila took the girls to a party in honor of the older girls winning their soccer league championship. Mostly, Obama relies on her mother, who retired last year, to take care of the children when she is away or dialing into radio shows from campaign headquarters.

Obama has developed a focus on working families and military families, but her chief campaign-trail role from the beginning has been as portraitist, etching the profile of an unfamiliar junior politician with an uncommon background and an unusual name. Her husband is one of



BY JAY LAPRETE — REUTERS

Michelle Obama told crowds in Ohio yesterday that her husband "gets" the issues facing average Americans. "He gets it because he's lived it," she said.

them, she assures listeners. Or, as she says several times in each speech, "He gets it."

The economic crisis, she said here, has become personal: "If it isn't directly happening to you," she said, "it's one moment away from directly happening to you."

As she spoke of rising food costs, shrinking job opportunities, elusive health care and the fear that the mail will bring a foreclosure notice, she created an opening to speak about her husband and his history.

But the history she chose to share was not his eight years in the Illinois Senate or nearly four in Washington. She did not mention Columbia University or his leadership of the Harvard Law Review, as she has before, or his dozen years as a constitutional law professor at the University of Chicago. What she said was, "We're both regular folks."

"He doesn't get it in some theoretical, disconnected, philosophical way," she said, responding to critics who consider Barack Obama too cool and detached. "He gets it because he's lived it. You see, there's something that happens to folks when they grow up regular."

The "regular" Obama of her narrative is the child born to a white teenage mother and an absent black father, then raised in part by a strong grandmother, who imparted a measure of her own mettle. This Obama rode scholarships and loans to the Ivy League, then scorned Wall Street to work as a community organizer in Chicago as steel plants were shutting their doors.

"Don't we deserve a leader who knows what it's like to carry a little loan debt?" Obama asked. "Barack Obama knows it because he's lived

it. Let me tell you something, Akron, Barack Obama gets it."

Before her speech, Obama dropped into the Akron campaign headquarters, where a dozen volunteers were dialing for voters. Taking a telephone from a supporter, Obama said cheerily, "How are you! You're still undecided? That's okay. What can I tell you about my husband?"

Over the next few minutes, Obama did some listening and some answering, offering a careful rationale for an Obama presidency. "We've been doing the same thing for the last eight years and it hasn't worked." She delivered a defense of her husband's credibility: "He's a fighter for regular folks, and that's our background."

"We're living close to the issues," she said in a soft voice, relating her own upbringing as the daughter of working-class parents who did not attend college. She mentioned her mother, retired and living on a pension; Barack Obama's sister, a teacher; and his ailing grandmother, who has long been unable to travel.

As she hung up, she said, "That's my pitch. Thank you for letting me go on and on."

Volunteers asked for her autograph before she climbed into her motorcade for the short ride to Buchtel High School, a diverse crowd and a welcome only slightly less raucous than her send-off. She started with a cheer and finished with a shout, creating a crescendo familiar to watchers of another Obama known for an ability to motivate a crowd.

"Can we do this?" Obama called repeatedly to growing roars of yes. "All right, let's change the world!"



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