



CAROLYN HAX

An un-'settling' comment: Astute or sour grapes?

Adapted from a recent online discussion:

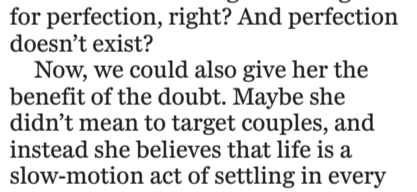
Dear Carolyn, A close friend of mine — single, accomplished and attractive, early 30s — observed that "most people settle." I'm confused as to what she means by this. I mean, technically I understand, but I'm wondering what she thinks all of these people should have held out for. With respect to our other close friends, all of them are in healthy relationships and/or are married to people who seem to be very good for them (educated, similar life goals, attracted to each other, loving). I understand that she is not happy with her own situation, but doesn't the comment about "settling" seem to be a bit personal in the grand scheme of things? I'm in a relationship, but I try not to take these comments to heart. What would you have said in response? (I said something to the effect of what I wrote above.)

D.C.

"All" of your close friends are in loving, healthy relationships with people who are still hot for them? I wish I didn't find that hard to believe, but I do. As for your friend — who isn't in a relationship, if I read you correctly — it's possible she's putting a self-congratulatory spin on her singularity: i.e., "No one has been as strong as I have in resisting society's pull." But if that's the case, then, like any spin, it sounds more defensive than proud — she feels bad so she's going to lift herself up by stepping on other people's relationships. It's also possible she just has a different take on all the pairings you're describing here, and thinks you and your friends gave up too much in your various commitment transactions. If she were in a relationship, then I'd say she might be rationalizing: "If I tell myself everyone's in a bad relationship, then I don't have to deal with the reality of my bad relationship." Any one of these would be a dismissive generalization, and so a fair response would be, "I don't think it's fair to generalize." Or you could just shrug her off, instead of getting defensive yourself: "Hey, whatever gets you through the day." The beauty of that one is that it can mean, "Yes, settling gets us through the day," or, "Yes, I guess lumping us all together gets you through the day," depending on how snarky you feel. Or you could agree, since the alternative to settling is holding out for perfection, right? And perfection doesn't exist? Now, we could also give her the benefit of the doubt. Maybe she didn't mean to target couples, and instead she believes that life is a slow-motion act of settling in every realm of human endeavor. It would make sense: Since the occasions where we run up against our limits (daily? hourly?) vastly outnumber the occasions where we surprise ourselves with our own strength, beauty, endurance, wit, resourcefulness, courage, selflessness — seriously, which do you do more times per day: save a life, or belch? — there's no way to get through life without scaling back our idealized visions of self, and settling for doing our best. How would I respond, in this case? "Hard to argue with that."

Read the whole transcript or join the discussion live at noon Fridays on www.washingtonpost.com/discussions.

Write to Tell Me About It, Style, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071, or tellme@washpost.com.



NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

REPORT FROM WEEK 861

In which you combined the names of longtime incumbent members of Congress to produce "joint legislation." The Empress slogged through almost 2,000 entries, many of which sounded like the words their authors intended only in the deluded little cocoon-brains of said authors. "Mica-Linder" for "my calendar." "Kingston-King" for "king stinking." And sorry, Mr./Ms. Hundreds of Losers, Rep. John Boehner calls himself "Bayner." (Also, Rep. Obey says "Obie"; Boucher, "Boocher"; Levin, "Levvin"; Goodlatte, "Goodlet"; Inouye,

INKER THE WINNER OF THE "In-no-way." The Rush-Farr-Oliver-Waters-Slaughter-Towns-Kaptur-Hastings-Castle-Kildee-King act to commemorate the achievements of William the Conqueror in 1066. (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)

- 2 the winner of the 1976 "Losers" comic book: The Shelby-Filner-Skelton bill to allow force-feeding of fashion models. (Pam Sweeney, St. Paul, Minn.)
3 The Edwards-Johnson-Kildee-Deal Presidential Qualifications Act (Michael Duffy, Washington, a First Offender)
4 Akaka-Mica-Waters-Brown measure to increase funding for the Blue Plains treatment plant. (Mark Eckenwiler, Washington)

THEY GOT THE ACTS: HONORABLE MENTIONS

- The Holden-Frank-Oliver-Camp-Farr National Parks Culinary Act (Steve Glomb, Alexandria)
The Boxer-Shelby-Akaka bill to encourage radical genetic engineering in spaniel breeding. (Beverly Sharp, Washington)
The Tanner-Levin Act Establishing Flexible Start Times for Committee Meetings (Craig Dykstra, Centerville)
The Dreier-Slaughter CIA appropriations bill to fund bloodless coups. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)
The Levin-Eshoo Housing Assistance Act for old women with many children. (May Jampathom, Oakhurst, N.J.)
The Boxer-Bachus-Brown "Wipe Out Incontinence" Act (Steve Fahey, Kensington)
The Watt-Akaka-Deal buyer's remorse act (Jonathan Paul; Rick Haynes, Potomac)
The Rush-Farr-Watt act to institute a national DMV motto. (Kevin Dopart)
The Holden-Akaka Troubled Asset Relief Program No. 2 (Larry Gordon, Potomac, whose last ink was in 1994)
The Byrd-Hatch-Feingold bill to reduce the deficit by selling shares in a goose said to produce valuable eggs. (Jonathan Paul; Christopher Lamora, Arlington)
The Dreier-Inouye Prohibition Prohibition Act (Dana Austin, Falls Church, a First Offender)
The Kildee-Levin-Young bill to censure bad animal mothers (Bruce Evans, Arlington)
The Eshoo-Boxer Commando Authorization Act (Les Holmes, Silver Spring, a First Offender)
The Slaughter-Pelosi Republican Reconciliation Act (Rick Wood, Falls Church)
The Watt-Boucher-Kildee-Byrd Market Poultry Origin Identification Act (Anthony Yeznach, Wilsonville, Ore.)
The Waters-Stearns bill to require hotels to include bidets. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)
The Rush-Payne Relief Act to provide everyone with a radio mute button. (Roger Dalrymple, Gettysburg, Pa.)
The Byrd-Hatch-Cochran-Farr Deadbeat-Father Child Support Act (Ward Kay, Vienna; Dion Black, Washington)
The Rangel-Castle-Inhofe bill for equitable division of divorce proceeds. (Craig Dykstra)
The Farr-Eshoo-Payne-Buyer-King-Kildee-Deal Bill to allow penalty-free returns of ill-fitting footwear. (Craig Dykstra)
The Eshoo-Pastor-Holden-Young-Oliver-Kohl-Waters Act to prohibit baptism of infants by river immersion. (Beverly Sharp)
The Inouye-Lowey-Leahy Yodeling

- Appreciation Act (Mae Scanlan, Washington)
The Waters-Rush-Pastor-Hatch Act to legalize skinny-dipping. (Lois Douthitt, Arlington)
The Johnson-Johnson-Levin-Levin-Lewis-Lewis-Smith-Smith-Young-Young Grand Canyon Preservation Act. (Michael Duffy)
The Watt-Engel-Eshoo-Holden Urinal Splatter Prevention Act requiring better aim in public restrooms. (Kevin Dopart)
The Tanner-Peterson-Waters Act to promote nude sailing. (John Holder, Charlotte)
Kildee-Scott-King-Duncan Bill to posthumously indict Macbeth for his actions in Act II. (Craig Dykstra)
The Byrd-Inouye resolution honoring the heroism of pilot Chesley Sullenberger. (Mark Eckenwiler)
The Kohl-Dorgan bill funding cures for impotence. (Mark Eckenwiler)
The Holden-Young-Johnson Act to research the causes of blindness (Jane Auerbach, Los Angeles)
Farr-Inouye, the best act that's ever been passed. (Jan Brandstetter, Mechanicsville, Md.)
And Last: The Taylor-Akaka resolution recognizing the Empress's editing for style and taste. (Kevin Dopart)
Next week: Be cheerful, or Blurb your enthusiasm

Online discussion Have a question for the Empress or want to talk to some real Losers? Join the Style Conversational at washingtonpost.com/styleconversational.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Week 865: 'No Googlenopes left'

This column's headline is indeed a Googlenope — a phrase that produces an announcement of "no results found" when you type it into the universe's biggest search engine since Nero Wolfe. (Or it was at press time.) We did our first Googlenope contest — the term was coined by two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning poop joke writer Gene Weingarten — back in 2007, and received thousands of entries. Three years later, the Google universe is exponentially larger. Are there any funny Googlenopes still out there — or have we reached the end of our 'nope'? Of course they're out there. This week: Come up with a humorous Googlenope; you may enclose your phrase in quotation marks (which narrows the search) if it has 10 words or fewer; if that's the case, also include the quotation marks when submitting your entry. Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a genuine Pet Rat Gummi Candy, which is like a Gummi Bear except that it is nine inches long, two inches wide and black. And looks disturbingly like a squashed rat. Donated with glee by Loser Melissa Yorks.

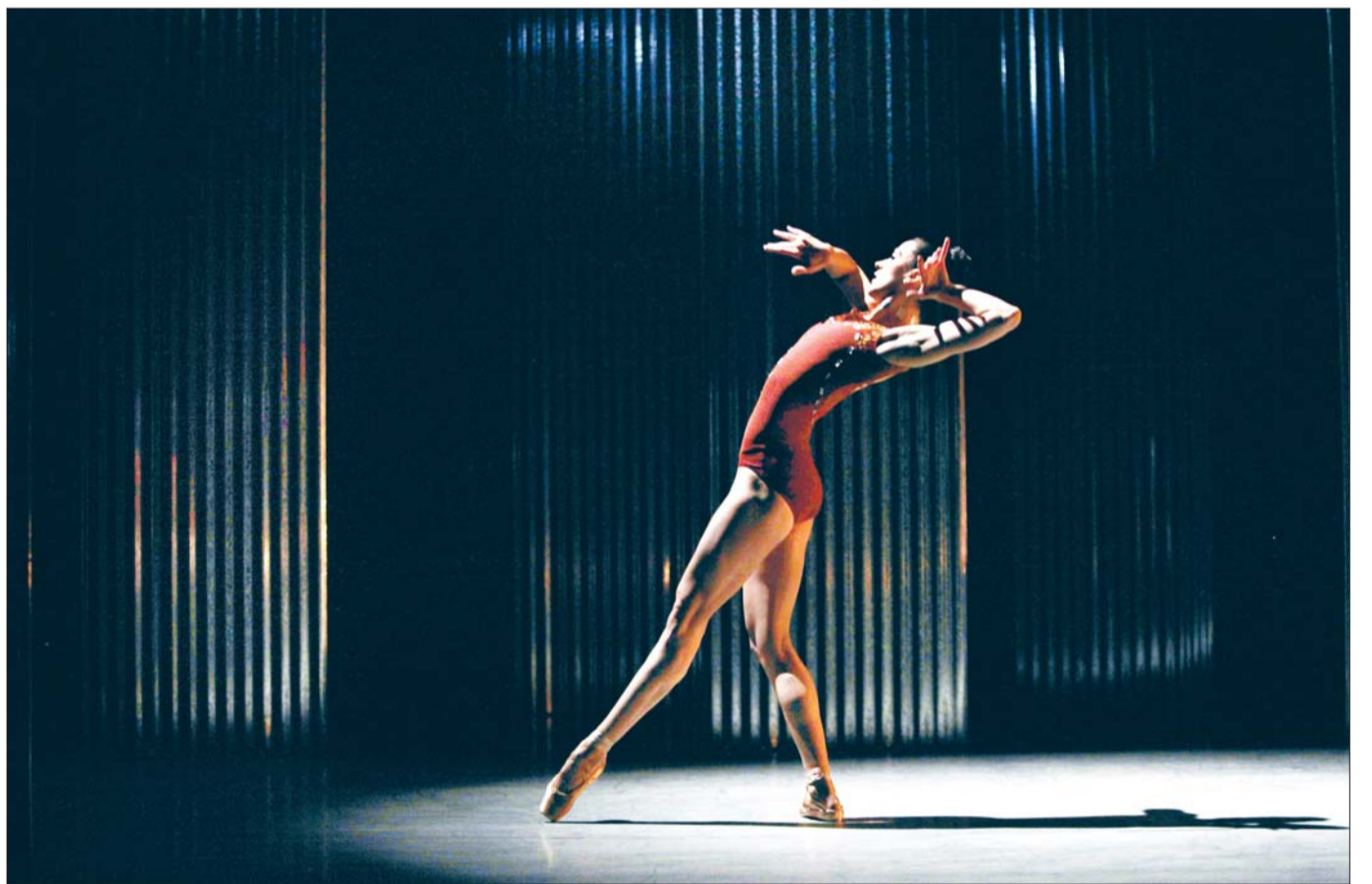
Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug. Honorable Mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Loser Magnets (in a TBA new design). First Offenders get a smelly tree-shaped air "freshener" (Fir Stink for their First Ink). One 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, April 26. Put "Week 865" 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 to be published May 15. 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 Judy Blanchard; this week's honorable-mentions subhead is by Beverly Sharp.

Sameness of program helps to dull parts' impact

DANCE REVIEW FROM C1

and had its arresting moments, a physical trick that elicited gasps, a sustained pose that stabbed through the weeds. Together, though, they felt bland, their impact blunted because they so obviously derived from the same source, which you can trace all the way back to when Balanchine first took the clothes off his dancers and explored their capacities as abstract expressive objects. What he left behind is a collection of masterpieces — and too heavy an influence on choreographers to come.

One of these is Armitage, deeply steeped in Balanchine's aesthetic while a young performer in the Geneva Ballet. Her "Brahms on Edge" was interesting in spots, but it strained to be profound. I don't think Liang or Fonte were after much more than sex, but Armitage was going for epic love, and you felt exhausted watching the chase. The music was a big part of the problem: six songs by Brahms, performed by mezzo-soprano Cynthia Hanna, with Joy Schreier on piano, both part of the Washington National Opera's Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program. Brahms as dance music is a tough sell. Balanchine succeeded in his Brahms opus "Liebeslieder Walzer" because of the depth of the dancers' interactions — we saw the inner lives of its characters emerge and change throughout it. But Armitage gave us only gloom, all tragic songs, their melancholy reflected in the flat, dim lighting. "Brahms on Edge" wasn't at the edge of anything; it was sunk deeply in the murky center. Fighting against the dullness was Sona Kharatian, a dark and wandering headcase who eventually landed in the arms of Jared Nelson. The ballet came to life when they danced together — he was all haunted ardor, she taunted him with throwaway cheesecake poses. Kharatian's cheesecake is more like Sacher torte, though — an absorbing dancer, she is all dense layers, more bitter than sweet, uninterested in your awe, revealing and holding back at the same time. The songs cried out for melodrama, and these two dancers supplied it: At one point, they run to opposite corners of the stage and shake their limbs out as if they were crawling with bugs — a frenzy that I presume was meant to express frustration. The group comes back, still slow, still downcast. After searching around them awhile, Nelson reunites with Kharatian and she flashes her crotch at us a



SUSAN BIDDLE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

RAVEL ROUSER: Sona Kharatian, a tall priestess wading into a whirlpool and stilling the waters, dominates "Bolero."

few more times, after which they cuddle on the floor and roll over to go to sleep. But with the dour lieder, the shadowy atmosphere, the torpor — we were way ahead of them. "Wunderland," which opened the program, was brighter and airier, with some unexpected twists on the conventional pas de deux. At one point, Elizabeth Gaither arcs into the air like she's about to do a back dive and Nelson catches her, light as gauze; it all happens in a breath. This was one of the deeper moments. Accompanied by Philip Glass's String Quartets Nos. 2, 3 and 5, the brief, fragmented scenes rolled by in a relentless parade of empty prettiness. Fonte's "Bolero" looked like more of the same — the hyperextending bodies, the searching for a hookup, the hookup that wrote a new Kama Sutra. Although it began in silence, much of the dancing resembled ice dancing, with high, showy overhead lifts. Then the music started — the insistent Ravel composition of the same name — and you think: Torvill and Dean! It was so hard to get their skating routine to the same music from the 1984 Olympics out of my head, but the famed ice dancers finally faded as the ballet

dancers played hide-and-seek among sheets of corrugated metal suspended around the stage like pillars (hooray for set design, a dying art). Kharatian dominated this work, too, a tall priestess wading into a whirlpool and managing to still the waters. It was campy, it was fluff, it closed with a cheap trick — but it broke up the monotony of goopy swoony lonely-hearts that began their existential journey in "Wunderland" and led us around every curve, every dimple, every hollow of their bodies. And nowhere new. kaufmans@washpost.com

DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU



NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST