



CAROLYN HAX

Future sister-in-law looks like a usurper

Adapted from a recent online discussion:

Dear Carolyn: My parents and I aren't exactly close. My mom and I have developed a comfortable relationship of bemused friendship since we're so very different people. She wanted a '50s housewife for a daughter, one who'd live down the road and go shopping and need her in the delivery room.

I'm... not that daughter. I like who I am, and I'm not that. So why does it bother me so very much that my brother's new fiancée is all those things and enjoys calling herself my mom's "replacement daughter"?

Anonymous

Because the fiancée thinks this is a competition and is using her domestic nature (or calculated appearance thereof) as proof that she's winning? And even though you know it's only a competition if you choose to compete, your uneasy peace with your mom leaves you vulnerable to feeling like you've lost emotionally, even when you know intellectually it's not a competition?

It's a theory. You can't be "replaced." So, regardless of the underlying politics, the best course is to focus on your relationship with your mom. And don't give your SIL-to-be anything to go on: "Yep, ha-ha, you're the replacement daughter. Okay, now run off and make cookies!" Smile!

Dear Carolyn: After a three-year man-battical, I'm now seeing a pretty amazing guy. But foolishly, I established a nearly impossible standard of beauty for myself — from shaving my legs (which I never did before, but he comes from a culture with a lot of hair-free women) to wearing makeup, which I normally never wear because (1) I believe it is just for special occasions, and (2) I don't need it to look my best. At what point can I start to let myself go? The grooming regimen is killing me.

Detroit

If you don't need makeup to look your best, then start by looking your best without it. It doesn't have to be more complicated than that.

As for the fuzz, I have to admit, you've left me advectionless. "He comes from a culture with a lot of hair-free women," I think, is my main problem, because I've got this image of armies of women without eyebrows.

Still, your decision to gussy up when you don't really mean it does verge on false advertising.

So how about this. Approach shaving the way you would for a man who didn't share your laissez-fur concept of beauty. Would you tell him, "This is who I am, love it or leave it"? If yes, then stop all shaving and primping.

Or would it be "Sure, I'll shave, since it's a small thing to do for someone I really like, even if it means shaving for the next 50 years"? In that case, keep shaving.

As long as you assume a regimen that you'd be willing to keep up indefinitely — even if it's more than you'd want, in a perfect world — that will at least keep the deception from going any further. From there, you can take your time getting to know him better, and seeing whether he's as comfortable in your perfect world as you are.

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 876

In which we sought song parodies with lyrics about the oil spill: Despite the grim subject matter — or perhaps because it inspired them to action (by the submission deadline, the spill had not been capped) — the Loser community submitted more than 300 songs, a lot of them with many verses. And not surprisingly, the humor this week isn't as hee-hee as some Invite results are; think of it as editorial-cartoon funny rather than comic-strip-gag funny. The songs used as sources spanned a huge variety of popular genres; the 11 songs Chris Doyle submitted ranged from Fred Astaire to country crooner Marty Robbins to "Tik Tok" by rap star Kesha. The space on this page limits us to excerpts of some of the songs; see washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational for full versions of these, plus many more — along with links to the original melodies.



To "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend"
A rig in the gulf may be quite detrimental,
But oil is a car's best friend;
And now, in July, we have come to repent all
Of the harm that's done
Procuring crude for everyone.
We are spoiled by being "oiled,"
And accept lousy means to an end,
For Mondays through Sundays we must have our
Hyundais,
Oil is a car's best friend. (Mae Scanlan, Washington)

2 winner of the roll of vertebrae-motif packing tape, This Is Spinal Tape:
To "One" from "A Chorus Line":
Tons! Spilling every hour,
About 8,000 tons a day,
Tons! Inverted oil shower,
Who liked fish, anyway?
One "boom" and suddenly oceans are full of goo.
But hey, they might stop the leak in a year or two!
Tons! Chasing off the tourists,
Covering the shores with guck.
Louisiana's out of luck again! Ohhhh...
BP! What were you guys doing?
Oh, gee! The leak just keeps on spewing
Tons and tons! (Laurie Brink, Cleveland, Mo.)

3 To "Blue Bayou"
(Sung by oil executives to federal inspectors)

Cash and crayfish, it's our treat,
Football games, a real great seat.
You will learn your life is so sweet
When we buy you.
Take your girlfriend for a meal.
Take this brand-new fishing reel.
Just take care that you never reveal
What we buy you... (Barbara Sarshik, McLean)

4 To "Do-Re-Mi"
(Sung by a BP executive)

Dough, the only green we see,
Ray of hope fades on the spill.
"Me," our mantra at BP,
Fa and near we're gonna drill.
So what if that slick's not gone?
LA, the folks there watch it grow.
Tee it up and just move on!
Time for us to make more dough.
(Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.)

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

OOZING ON UP: HONORABLE MENTIONS

To the "Addams Family" theme:
It's seeping and it's soupy,
It's greasy and it's goopy,
The ocean smells like poopy: the oil from BP.
From down where you can't see it,
The oil pipe has splee-it,
And now we're in deep [poopy],
The oil from BP. Slick.
Thick... I'm sick.
So when you're on vacation,
No need to hit the station
For engine lubrication —
Free oil from BP! (Craig Dykstra, Centerville)

Hymn of the BP Cleanup Corps, to the Marines' Hymn
When you need more than a Roomba
On the shores now slippery,
We combat the public outcry,
Cleaning birds on land and sea.
We will fight with booms and skimmers,
We'll head oil off at the pass.
Then perhaps Barack will spare us
When he starts to "kick some ass."
(Dion Black, Washington)

To "Wouldn't It Be Lovely"
(Sung by Gov. Bobby Jindal)

All I want is a thousand more
Engineers on the berms offshore
Obama's Army Corps,
Now shouldn't they be shoveling?
Lots of dredgers to get them built,
Lots of soil soaking oil that's split.
More sand, more land, more silt,
Now shouldn't they be shoveling?...
(Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

To "Summertime"
Drilling time, and forget the Big Easy.
Fish are jumping, swimming far from the spill.
Oh, Big Papa's rich and the shrimp are all greasy,
So hush, little baby — drill, baby, drill.
(Edmund Conti, Raleigh, N.C.)

To "Pure Imagination"
Come with me to the sea,
Note the gulf's recarbonification
And BP won't provide any decent explanation.
Listen in, it's a sin,
Hear them spin their gross miscalculation
While they dodge any guilt implication...
(Eric Murphy, Washington)

See fuller versions of some of these songs — along with many others, with links to the melodies — in the online version of this column at washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational.

Next week: Quipped from the headlines, or True-rhyme reporting

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 780: Our greatest hit



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Sitcoma: Typical weeknight TV fare.

Though the Empress announces close to a dozen neologism contests every year, it's this contest — which we first did in 1998 — that's still Fw'd around the Web more than any other Invite (more often than not with the totally inaccurate title of "Mensa Invitational"): **This week: Start with a real word or multi-word term or name that begins with Q, R or S; add one letter, subtract one letter, replace one letter with another, or transpose two adjacent letters; and define the new word**, as in the example above from Week 512 in 2003 by John O'Byrne of Dublin, who has been entering the Invite virtually every week since 2000. Note that it's the original word, not the result, that must start with one of those letters. Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives an Inflatable Tongue, a rubber thing that looks like a tongue if you hang it out of your mouth, at least until you blow into it, at which point it looks like tongue bubble gum, but isn't. Donated by the genuinely tongued Dave Prevar. And we'll also throw in a bottle of Lady Anti Monkey Butt powder, also from Dave.

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. 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, Aug. 9. Put "Week 880" 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 Aug. 28. 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 was sent by Kevin Dopart; this week's honorable-mentions subhead is by Craig Dykstra.

'Rubicon': The code breaker as a broken man

TV PREVIEW FROM C1

Aside from the untucked shirttails and hipster messenger bags, this is our first indication that "Rubicon" is set in the relative present, with all its attendant fixations on conspiracy, deceit, terror and notions of shadow governments of the Code Orange era. But this is not a Jack Bauer world. It's been noted that "Rubicon's" vibe seems descended from those cerebral "Parallax"-y and "Condor"-esque thrillers of the 1970s. "Rubicon" also has the beige-and-gray, washed-out feel of those times; it smartly references the ways (economic, political, cultural) the past decade can frequently bear an eerie resemblance to the '70s of parking garages, concrete and dourness.

But enough about mood; what about the story? It's dense — and intentionally so. If you miss the first couple of episodes, you may as well not bother.

Creator-writer Jason Horwitch (whose previous credits include the movie "Finding Graceland" and a TV movie about Evel Knievel, and not much else) has layered "Rubicon" with the sorts of clues and references — possibly irrelevant, possibly not — that potentially turn a fan into a geek. When Will's team members receive their "intake" assignments, they don't immediately rush to their PCs or whip out a smartphone. This show prefers stacks of manila folders that are rubber-banded together. It likes newspaper clippings, references to books (actual books), and clues frantically arrayed on a corkboard festooned with sticky notes. There are globes, chess boards, typewriters, mythological references and a Graham Greene novel.

In its first few episodes, "Rubicon" is almost refreshingly free of gizmos and the dreaded "whatever technology" that propel shows like "CSI" and "24" — without feeling faux-academic, in the "Da Vinci Code" sense. (When Will's people want tech help, they must go to the darkened cubicle of a computer geek they call "Hal.") In fact, the whole thing begins with a mysterious billionaire committing suicide after noticing a four-leaf clover affixed to his morning newspaper. (His what?)

As his widow (Miranda Richardson, a welcome sight) begins a long journey of learning about her husband's many secrets, Will gets acci-

dentally interested in an answer in the day's puzzle (the Latin word for four-leaf clover) and finds that the same clue is in every newspaper's crossword — a coincidence he feels must be a conspiratorial message.

Bringing up the crossword thing to his boss in short order leads to: the boss's mysterious death, Will's promotion to team leader (where he now reports to a wickedly watchable Arliss Howard) and elaborate conspiracies that will no doubt lead to other conspiracies.

Which may exasperate, but not so far. Without feeling like it's leading us on, "Rubicon" is a tightly woven and urbane-ly acted tale for people who like to mull.

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CRAIG BLANKENHORN/AMC

TEAM PLAYERS: Jessica Collins, James Badge Dale and Arliss Howard in AMC's morose new drama about a group of code crackers in Manhattan.

DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU



CUL DE SAC BY RICHARD THOMPSON

