



CAROLYN HAX

Relations turn chilly after sister-in-law's affair is exposed

Adapted from a recent online discussion.

Hi, Carolyn:

I was very close to my brother's wife till about six years ago, when I learned she was having an affair with a mutual friend. I confronted her and told her I would have to tell my brother (I mean, he's my BROTHER). She begged me not to, but would not agree to tell him herself, so I did it anyway. He forgave her and they worked through it, but my sister-in-law has still not forgiven me.

Since that happened, I have finished grad school, gotten married, and had a baby. My brother was minimally involved in all three events and my sister-in-law didn't acknowledge any of them. I'm so disappointed at how all this has turned out, but worst of all I don't feel as if I deserve to be cut out of the family for telling the truth.

On family loyalty

If I had to guess, I'd say your brother has forgiven you, but that his wife makes it so difficult for him to have you around that it's the path of least resistance for him to keep you at arm's length. Sad, if true, not to mention gutless.

Have you talked to your brother about it? He's the linchpin — the one who needs to stand up for you, or, alternately, to give you his rationale for his "minimal involvement."

I don't necessarily think there is a good reason, because even if he thinks your meddling was wrong, it's pretty clear you were at least trying to do right by him. But only he can speak to that.

Regardless, estrangement is a choice your brother and his wife are free to make — and if they stick to it, all you can do is be accessible and warm, make noninvasive efforts to stay in touch, and hope time changes their minds.

Hi, Carolyn:

How do you know the difference between cold feet and the wrong relationship? I'm getting married in a month to an amazing man, but lately I've found myself looking fondly back on my studio apartment that I didn't have to share, and remembering how, 10 years ago, I wanted to be a spinster forever.

I've also started noticing more men I'm interested in — just on a surface level — and thinking about my life with any of them vs. my soon-to-be-husband. We are blessed in our relationship, he loves me, I think I love him, we have a wonderful dog and a great condo. I don't want children, so I feel like I've gotten into this for the right reasons, but why now am I so suddenly lukewarm about it?

Cold feet

Ew. It's normal for people who share a home, even a loving one, to daydream about having their own space. Though if you have a mature relationship, you can find ways to give each other a little breathing room.

What I can't shrug off is the loveless way you described your life with your fiancé. You're on board with the dog and the condo? And, eh, he'll do? What a lucky guy ...

If it's not about his companionship, then it's not about the "right reasons." That's it.

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

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



NICK GALAFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

REPORT FROM WEEK 893

in which we asked you to write humorous stories of 25 words or fewer: Some of you were much looser than we were about what constituted a story, sending in basically a bunch of one-liners that each featured a pun or little observation. The Czar of The Style Invitational (Ret.), after being shown these and some other entries, ever so haughtily pronounced the top winners excellent but declared he could outdo the others in five minutes. We leave that for you to decide: "She moaned, he gasped, time stopped. Sinew met softness in that sweet, screamless surrender from which new life arises, in this case Bernie Madoff."



Hanoi, 1969: General Nguyen asked the colonel, "How can we use the prisoner to defeat America from within?" He replied, "I have an idea." — "The Wasilian Candidate" (Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn)

2 the winner of the U.S.A. vs. Commies play set: "The gimmick is that Bruce Willis is dead for the whole movie." "Oh, great, thanks a lot. Well, I slept with your wife." (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

3 Years after the senseless tragedy that took her children's lives, she told her tale: "Captain Sullenberger ... Mother Goose began, to a chorus of boos." (Bruce Harris, Scotch Plains, N.J., a First Offender)

4 He viewed the ad as a challenge: Four hours — nothing! Eventually his girlfriend called the Guinness people. Days later, he called the doctor. (Vyatas V. Vergeer, Washington)

MORE'S THE PITHY: HONORABLE MENTIONS

"I know President Obama would love my book," he thought. "But how can I get him a copy?" (Fil Feit, Annandale)

... With One Stone While his wife nagged, Abner prayed under the stars: Lord, remove wife and debt. A meteorite killed her. It sold big on eBay. (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

Leslie Johnson was puzzled when Jack gave her a bra four sizes too large. Anyway, she'd really hoped for an ankle bracelet. (Marleen May, Rockville)

No Joy in Melville Ricky didn't mind detention this week. The assignment was to read "Bartleby the Scrivener." He chose not to. (Frank Byrns, Laurel, a First Offender)

Samuel Adams urged on the rebellious colonists as they threw the tea overboard. "A perfect plan," he thought. "Now they'll drink more beer." (Harvey Smith, McLean)

Janine had always been a supporter of organic, cage-free practices. But this time her egg donor was not getting away. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

With Apologies to Fredric Brown The last man on Earth sat alone in

a room, playing his Xbox 360. He ignored the knock on the door. (Dixon Wragg, Santa Rosa, Calif.)

He told his wife that he was working late. He actually was working late. D.C. can be so boring. (Harvey Smith, McLean)

Short Story An event transpired that created a problem. Conflict ensued for our hero. Eventually a solution was found. Our hero grew from this experience. The end. (Dixon Wragg)

With his severed tongue now in her hand, Oliver knew both of them would never say they're sorry. (Kevin Dopart)

Let's see: Merkowski . . . Murkowsky . . . Lisa? Liza? Before the Merkowski, or after it with a comma? All caps, or lowercase? . . .

God, it's cold . . . (Tom Murphy, Bowie)

"Nobody loves a fat girl," Becky lamented as the wagons moved up the snowy gap. — "Donner Party Blues" (Jeff Brechlin)

Field Trip "Boys and girls, this is the world's largest, best-preserved Gigantisaurus egg." "Wow!" "Cool!"

"Long ago — you have a question?" "How come it's cracking?" (Nancy

Israel, Bethesda)

"Your brownies are delicious," Harry's co-worker said. "Beats stealing your lunch," another added. They all laughed. In four to six hours, Harry would laugh last. (Lawrence McGuire)

Grandpa Phil Tells Us How He Took Out the Trash That Day (A True Story)

"I put it into designah shopping bags with nice tissue paper . . . left 'em in a mall pahkin' lot . . . an' sat in my cah. An' watched." (Daria Panichas, Philadelphia, a First Offender)

"Stop flailing! I've got your wrist and won't let go!" she shouted, frantic to pull him back aboard. "That's not my wrist!" (Elwood Fitzer, Valley City, N.D.)

November is National Novel Writing Month: "I'll write the great American novel," he declares. His goal: 50,000 words. Stops at 25. He gets published, though. (Ward Kay, Vienna)

Next week: Look back in Inker, or Wry, wry again

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Week 897: Catch their drift

"Complete auto care starts with our \$17.99 oil change." Plain English: "For only \$17.99, we'll tell you that you need new shocks, struts, brakes, exhaust system, valve cover gaskets, water pump, CV joints, wiper blades and, of course, tires."

— Russ Taylor, Week 729 honorable mention, 2007

People who talk to The Washington Post, or advertise in The Washington Post, or occasionally even write for The Washington Post, sometimes are a bit less than brutally honest when they explain things. Sometimes it's willful obfuscation; sometime it's just being civil. Bah to all that. Calling all brutes once again: **Take any sentence from an article or an ad in The Washington Post or washingtonpost.com from Dec. 3 to Dec. 13 and translate it into "plain English,"** or otherwise snarkily explain what it "really" means, as in the example above from when we did this contest before.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place gets — just in time to be too late for Thanksgiving and Christmas — this dashing hat in the style of a turkey carcass, modeled here by Rylan Gottron of Fort Washington.



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, Dec. 13. Put "Week 897" 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 Jan. 1. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, or their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's results was submitted by Tom Vitte. The honorable-mentions subhead is by Kevin Dopart.

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

'Christmas Carol': An old chestnut sizzles again

Audacious Ford's production trims the treacle, packs special effects kids will enjoy

BY PETER MARKS

Bless Edward Gero's performances, every one.

The versatile Gero brings the requisite sourness, gruffness and contrition to Ebenezer Scrooge, the Yuletide character every stage actor who lasts long enough in the business eventually gets around to playing. Surrounded by an ensemble of Washington stalwarts, Gero is the formidable anchor of Ford's Theatre's perennial seasonal serving of Dickens.

This version of "A Christmas Carol: A Ghost Story of Christmas" made its Ford's debut last year, and it returns with many of its leading players: Gero's Scrooge; the Cratchits of Christopher Bloch and Amy McWilliams; Felicia Curry and Anne Stone as glittery Ghosts of Christmas Past and Present, and a spectral Drew Eshelman, dragging the chains of the not-so-dearly-departed Jacob Marley.

Under Michael Baron's capable direction, they unfold a robustly spooky incarnation of the story, in an adaptation by Michael Wilson. The musical accent on this occasion is on the intermingling of this "Carol" with other well-known carols: Sprinkled over the evening are renditions of such familiar songs of the season as "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," "O Christmas Tree," "Good King Wenceslas" and "O Come, All Ye Faithful."

Just as the tunes instantly can put you in a holiday frame of mind, there's something about the frequent retelling of this cold-then-warm story that lightens American hearts at this time of year. Perhaps the tale of a greedy man of means who learns the lesson of generosity rings even truer than usual nowadays: You can't help but notice in Wilson's treatment that the toast Scrooge comes up with at one point is, "Here's to a quick foreclosure!" Scrooge's impoverished debtors, too, are accorded ample stage time, providing for a redemptive closing scene that might even bring a tear to the eye of an administrator of the Troubled Assets Relief Program.

The creative team devises a visually appealing production with a few crafty special effects, particularly in the scene in which Marley materializes in the terrified Scrooge's bedroom and performs some mischief with the furniture. As in Ford's last offering, the '50s Broadway romantic comedy "Sabrina Fair," the scenery is satisfyingly eye-filling; the



T. CHARLES ERICKSON

SUPERB SKINFLINT: Edward Gero's Ebenezer Scrooge enriches "Carol."

Ford's stage has never been dressed so well.

Set designer Lee Savage constructs a

streetscape over which is suspended a series of arches that suggests the early Industrial Age. The carts of the street vendors are enjoyable embellishments, as is the motorized contraption driven by a clock seller played by Stephen F. Schmidt.

Though the production runs almost two hours, the carols and the effects represent a dependable stimulus package for the imaginations of your little ones. Things do get a little creepy with the arrival of the ghost from the future, a being out of Edward Gorey's macabre sketchbook. But a sweetness asserts itself as well, particularly in the performances of the children, who all come across as authentic and not cloyingly theatrical. The evening of course cries out for an adorable Tiny Tim, and that job requirement is grandly met by Stephen Scholl, who alternates in the part with Nicholas Snipes.

The adults, similarly, avoid the traps in "A Christmas Carol" of excessive portentiousness and sentimentality. Somehow, Eshelman develops moments of drollery for the lugubrious Marley, and Bloch applies a tenderly solicitous varnish to Bob Cratchit. Curry and Stone prove to be lively Christmas spirits, and Rick Ham-

merly makes for a buoyant major domo at the Fezziwigs' sprightly feast. You need, naturally, a Scrooge of emotional and technical dexterity, and Gero fills the bill on both scores, giving us a man who credibly has the blisters of callousness and selfishness lifted from his eyes.

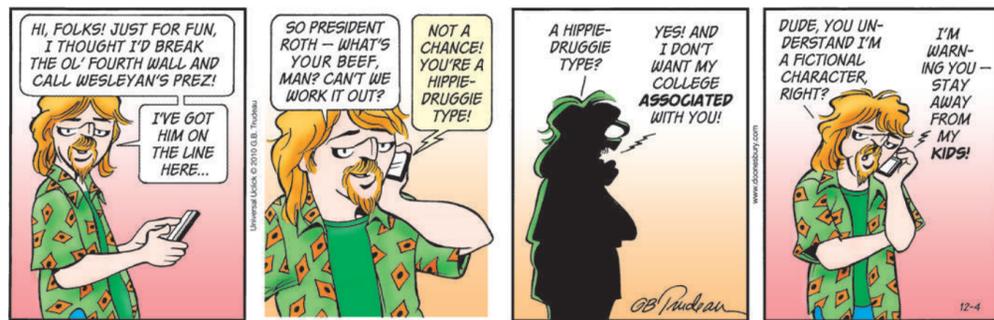
Listless moments do intrude, in a few sluggish dialogue scenes, but this adaptation of "Christmas Carol" makes quick recoveries. When the incidental roles are portrayed by such accomplished actors as Tom Story, Helen Hedman and Erin Driscoll, even the most predictable features of an oft-told tale can be virtues.

marks@washpost.com

A CHRISTMAS CAROL: A GHOST STORY OF CHRISTMAS

by Charles Dickens, adapted by Michael Wilson. Directed by Michael Baron. Costumes, Alejo Vietti; lighting, Rui Rita; choreography, Shea Sullivan; original music and sound, Josh Schmidt; wigs, Charles G. LaPointe; choral direction, Jay Crowder; dialects, Leigh Wilson Smiley. With Bligh Voth, Steven Carpenter, Michael Bunce, Brooke Bloomquist, Jamie Eacker, Jacob Yeh. About two hours. Through Jan. 2 at Ford's Theatre, 511 10th St. NW. Call 202-397-SEAT or visit www.fords.org.

DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU



CUL DE SAC BY RICHARD THOMPSON

