

**CAROLYN HAX**

*Adapted from a recent on-line discussion:*

**Dear Carolyn:**  
My boyfriend is going to break up with me today. I'm pretty sure of it, even though he hasn't said so. He wants to talk this afternoon about "where we are," and my experience tells me that's always a bad thing. So how do I get through the day with this terrible thing looming over me?  
Washington

Get a head start on your sense of relief?  
I can imagine three possible scenarios that would explain your certainty a breakup is coming.  
1. It hasn't been going too well, and you know it, but you haven't wanted to face it. In that case, the relief would be for ending the suspense.

2. It was just the "where we are" phrasing and nothing more, which means everything has been going great and you had no idea he was thinking breakup. In that case, either he's not breaking up with you after all (cause for immediate relief), or he's going to dump you completely out of the blue, indicating he isn't someone you wanted to invest in any more deeply than you already have. Delayed relief, but relief nonetheless.

3. You have Beyore tendencies, and a breakup will validate your worldview?  
Maybe I'm off on all three. But whatever the case may be, your jumping to the breakup conclusion suggests that you realize you're more into the relationship than he is. If so, that's a situation best relegated to the past. Painful as it may be.

**Re: Relegated to the past:**  
To spin off the first question, what happens when you're more into it than the other person, they break it off, but then they say they still want to be super-close to you (and attempt to do so)?  
I want this, too, but more because I still love this person. I know I'd just hope there's still a chance we could work out. I swore I knew this was the right person for me, which adds to the pain, I guess.  
Anonymous

To quote the estimable "Pretty Woman," you "want the fairy tale." If anything less would devastate you, then be fierce about holding out for what you want and need. Tell the person you're sorry, but you're not interested in anything less than his/her whole heart. The only way it's going to "work out" is if this person falls naturally for you just as hard as you've fallen.

While that sometimes happens gradually between two close friends, I have yet to see it happen between two people who are trying to stay friends post-breakup, and one of the two is still pining.  
I know there's an example of everything out there, but this is something I genuinely have not witnessed, firsthand or in column form, and that has to be good for something. I'm sorry.

**Re: "This was the right person for me":**  
With extremely rare exceptions, there is no single "right person" for anyone. There are people whose views and personalities work exceptionally well with yours. If you think you work exceptionally well together and s/he doesn't agree, then you're not the "right person" for each other. Unless you're a masochist.  
Anonymous 2

Right, an important end note, thanks. Although — how can you prove the "rare exceptions"?

Read the whole transcript or join the discussion live at noon Fridays on [www.washingtonpost.com/discussions](http://www.washingtonpost.com/discussions).

Write to Tell Me About It, Style, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071, or [tellme@washpost.com](mailto:tellme@washpost.com).



**The Style Invitational »**

**REPORT FROM WEEK 823**

In which we sought haiku about current events — "haiku," for our purposes, being any three-line poem with five syllables in the first line, seven in the second and five in the third. Many, many fine entries this week, although a lot of entries weren't by any stretch about any current event, and some people seemed unable to count to five or seven. The contest week coincided with the Iranian riots, the deaths of several celebrities, and the odd Father's Day vacation of South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford.



*the winner of the It's Happy Bunny incense:*

- 2** I remember when  
"Folding newspaper" meant we'd  
Make a pirate hat. (Lois Douthitt, Arlington)
- 3** Brave Iranians!  
We hear your cries of liber—  
Whoa! Michael just died! (Tom Scocca, Silver Spring, a First Offender)
- 4** Saint Peter asks if  
Jacko can show ID: "You  
Don't look familiar." (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

**LOWER ON THE HAIKU TEST: HONORABLE MENTIONS**

- Appalachian Trail?**  
**The Andes? What's the diff? My Wife said, "Take a hike!"** (Ellen Raphaeli, Falls Church)
- Just as with Elvis, Michael's selling more albums. But from the flip side.** (Judith Cottrill, New York)
- First, Michael Jackson; Then Billy Mays — the same age. Fifty's the new dead.** (Craig Dykstra, Centreville)
- Ousted in a coup? The Honduran army says Manuel's Zelaya.** (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)
- "Dear Occupiers," Says Iraq. "Good riddance. But Don't abandon us."** (L. John Martin, Bethesda, a First Offender)
- The great recession: A case of the subprime and The ridiculous.** (John O'Byrne, Dublin)
- "Economy sucks. Roadkill is our food again." "Food? You have some food?"** (Richard Rosen, Mount Vernon, N.Y.)
- Ahnd's state is broke: Pays with paper IOUs. Best hope: They'll be baacked.** (Phil Frankenfeld, Washington)
- Ahmadinejad Deemed winner by imams: Sic Semper Tehranis.** (Brendan Beary)

- Madoff goes to jail A century and a half: May he live so long.** (Russell Beland, Fairfax)
- Al Franken I'm good enough, right? Doggone it, people like me! (Just enough of them.)** (Phil Frankenfeld)
- Obama's had, what, Five months — and all's not fixed yet? What's taking so long?** (Pie Snelson, Silver Spring)
- Socialism here!! Televised execution! (Of a fly — but still!)** (Michael Woods, Arlington, a First Offender)
- Sarah Palin's Resignation To stay in office: "That's a quitter's way out."** As ...
- Opposed to quitting?** (Frances Hira-Clark, Columbia)
- Like Jacko, the Nats — For no apparent reason — Wear gloves on one hand.** (Ira Allen, Bethesda)
- Jon and Kate plus eight, Plus two in rendezvous, we hear? Where do they find time?** (Andrew Langreich, Annapolis, a First Offender)
- Leader Kim Jong Il Out of sight, not out of mind.**

- Only out of his.** (Christopher Lamora, Arlington)
- CEO Jobs gets Non-Apple replacement parts. Warranty canceled.** (Kevin Dopart, Washington)
- "Virginia Closing Half of Rest Stops" New test for license: You must drive your car safely While your legs are crossed.** (Ellen Raphaeli)
- Strip this girl! Find the Bomb! Drugs! Knives! Guns! Oh! My! God! An ibuprofen?** (Emery Walters, Reston)
- And Last: Only Farrah and Michael, Palin, Sanford, Kim Jung II? Weak haiku news week.** (Dave Zarrow)
- More Honorable Mentions can be found at [washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational](http://washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational).**
- Next Week: Jestions, or City Snickers**

**ONLINE DISCUSSION** Have a question for the Empress or want to talk to some real Losers? Join the Style Conversational at [washingtonpost.com/styleconversational](http://washingtonpost.com/styleconversational).



**Week 827: Caller IDiot**

To the customer service line for Sylvania Double Soft White Light Bulbs:  
*Gene: I have a complaint about these products. They're not soft.*  
*Robert: I'm sorry?*  
*Gene: Your package says they're soft, but they're not. They smash just like any other bulbs. I've smashed 12 of them already.*

The other day, the Empress received an instant message from her comrade-in-toilet-humor Gene Weingarten, writer of the Below the Beltway column in The Washington Post Magazine. "I am making 800-number calls," he reported. "You know, you could do an invite on that. First lines to ask."  
The Empress thought this was a pretty swell idea, and she and Gene continued to talk at length about how the contest would work — who would judge, when we'd do it, would you need the real phone number, etc.  
It was not till three hours later that it dawned on the Empress that she had done the identical contest three years ago — and that Gene had chosen the winners. So if neither of us remembered, what better excuse to do it again? **This week: Name a real product or company and supply a stupid question or complaint for the consumer hotline person. This year's twist: Not only will Weingarten choose the top winners, but he also promises to call the top four 800-numbers for customer questions and complaints (the ones on the packages), and ask the questions, provided they're supplied along with the entry.** So: You don't have to send in the 800-number; your entry doesn't even have to be for a product that offers one. But you won't make the top four. See [washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational](http://washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational) for a link to the 2006 results; one way not to be duplicative is to write about a new product or to use a current angle.  
Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place gets, courtesy of genuine economist Russell Beland, a Magic 8-Ball imitation that advises, "Buy now," "bear market ahead," etc. This is the same model that Tim Geithner uses. Ben Bernanke juggles several and goes with the most promising answer.

**Other runners-up** win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or Loser Mug. 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 Ink). One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to [losers@washpost.com](mailto:losers@washpost.com) or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Aug. 3. Put "Week 827" 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 Aug. 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. This week's honorable-mentions name is by Kevin Dopart; next week's revised title was submitted by both Kevin Dopart and Michael Turniansky.

**White House Spotlights the Designs of the Times**

AWARDS. From Page C1

Thursday evening, in time for a Cooper-Hewitt cocktail party atop the W Washington, with its views of the city's monuments. But before his first beer, the slight, low-key minimalist was tucked into a corner of the hotel's acid-trip lobby bar; he was dressed in a white shirt and khakis — the picture of Calvin Klein restraint. And Costa was having a little trouble putting into words what it was like to win, to be invited to lunch at the White House and to be mentioned in the same breath as the person who invented the world's first laptop. "I think this is major. It's incomprehensible," he said. "I come from the middle of nowhere in Brazil. It's... amazing."  
"I look at fashion and I feel like it's such a different category," he said. "Those people are really making changes in the way we live... I look at the field of architecture. It takes longer and it lasts forever."  
"I just created some dresses."  
But the point of the Cooper-Hewitt awards, and of the White House's support of them, was to make clear that artistic expression comes in a multitude of ways, is informed by math and science, and can be at its most profound when it is modest and intimate. As one of the other winners, Calvin Tsao, noted, fashion is the most personal and basic kind architecture. It is the reassuring shelter that we carry with us everywhere we go.  
Of the big three names in contemporary American fashion, Ralph Lauren focused on creating a fantasy of old money and storybook Americana. He is the great illusionist. Donna Karan has, at her core, been intent on solving women's aesthetic dilemmas: how to feel sexy while remaining discreet, how to balance wide hips with narrow shoulders, how to look both feminine and powerful. Calvin Klein — not the sex-obsessed jeans and underwear Klein, but the utterly spare designer of chic women's ready-to-wear — always focused on line and fabric, the simplest, most minimalist aspects of style. This is a label that rarely had a use for a hue brighter than gray. It shunned frumpy such as ruffles and lace. Even buttons were too ostentatious.  
Costa began designing the women's collection in 2004, after Klein's retirement. He had a rocky start, with runway samples that were poorly constructed and sev-



BY MARVIN JOSEPH — THE WASHINGTON POST

eral collections in which indulgent experimentation ran afoul of the realities of a woman's body and, for that matter, her life. Costa has settled into a sensibility that always aims to meld artistic daring with wearability.  
His spring 2009 collection epitomized what the Cooper-Hewitt awards celebrate. It was a design exercise that brought together a host of disciplines such as architecture and sculpture; and yet, it still considered the day-to-day requirements of the woman who might ultimately wear these clothes. The collection was based on cubes and right angles. Costa, in essence, put square clothes on a round person and managed to make her look sensual.  
The dresses and jackets were all sharp angles and intractable lines; there were no curves in this collection. He wanted the clothes to have volume that could be sustained without any underlying structure, without crinolines, boning or panniers, for instance. And he wanted the clothes to collapse into a neat predetermined series of folds so a woman could pack them into a suitcase and have them emerge hours later unscathed.  
"It was trial and error, a lot more than usual because it involved mathematics and geometry," Costa said. "That collection was very challenging."



BY JAH CHIKWENDU — THE WASHINGTON POST

**"I look at fashion and... it's such a different category," Francisco Costa said of fellow award winners, whom Michelle Obama honored. "Those people are really making changes in the way we live... I just created some dresses."**

Before he presented it to the media on the runway last year, he told Tom Murray, the company's president, to brace himself. "I warned him, I might get killed by the press."

The reviews were mixed, mostly because it was a collection that was a celebration of what was possible rather than what was commercial. And Costa admits that it was "a very difficult collection at retail," which is a designer's diplomatic way of saying that it was a really tough sell.

But Friday was not a day to worry about the economics of the fashion industry. It was an opportunity to spotlight creative excellence. As part of the Obamas' attempt to break down barriers between the White House and the surrounding community, each of the Cooper-Hewitt winners was dispatched, before lunch, along with representatives from the administration, to museums around the city. They were asked to talk about design — to describe their process and their purpose — and to bring what can

sometimes be a rarified world to everyday folks. All of the panels were free to the public.

"We wanted to make sure that when we bring in the best of the best of design, we wanted them to get out into the D.C. community," said Ebs Burnough, White House deputy social secretary, who moderated a panel with Costa at the Corcoran Gallery of Art.

Costa, alongside Zack McKown and Tsao, spoke to a nearly full house. The fashion designer narrated a video of his spring collection. As models walked serenely down his austere runway, it was possible to see the technical magic he'd managed to stitch together. Squares of wool, silk and nylon floated around lean young women. The dresses billowed out on nothing but air and stayed aloft through tricks of textiles, folds and well-placed seams.

When it came time to take questions from the audience, the focus was not on how Costa did it — he had explained that to everyone as best he could — it was instead, "How can I do that, too?"

Or if not, "How can my daughter do that?"

In an audacious act of parental cheerleading, Nina Hammond raised her hand to ask how her 12-year-old daughter, Clarke Smith, who was not there, might launch a career in fashion. Hammond also just happened to have an example of her daughter's work — a little purple party dress with a black tulle skirt — which she pulled from a plastic bag at her feet with little encouragement (none, actually). After Costa assessed the work as pretty impressive for a 12-year-old and encouraged the daughter to follow her dream to New York and even suggested that she'd be welcome at Calvin Klein — in that polite, in-the-heat-of-the-moment manner — Hammond inquired: Can I get your contact number?

Later, at the luncheon, the first lady, dressed in a short-sleeve, sunshine yellow Michael Kors suit, noted: "These kids who are living just inches away from power and prestige and fortune and fame, we want those kids to know that they belong here, too. We want them to know that they belong here in the White House and in the museums, and in libraries, and laboratories all over this country."

And at least one mother in the District wanted her daughter to know, that she belonged at Calvin Klein, too.