

Sister wants to give gifts, too

Dear Annie: My half-brother and his wife are old enough to be my parents. He is quite well-to-do and so are his children. I am only six years older than his oldest child and have always felt more like one of his kids than his sister, especially after my parents died.

However, I am never invited to spend holidays with them. I was widowed 25 years ago, and one of my children has since passed away. My brother and sister-in-law have gifted me \$300 each year on my birthday, and although it would give me great pleasure to reciprocate, they rarely allow me to do so. Last month, they discouraged me from giving them gifts for Christmas, which I understand. They are trying to pare down their belongings.

Last year, I saved up and gave them a \$100 gift card. I thought I'd hit on the perfect present. But this year, my sister-in-law said bluntly, "Don't be coming in here with presents like last year. Save your gift cards for your daughter. The money we give you is for you — not to be returned to us."

After that call, I spiraled into a depression that lasted for days, and the holiday was ruined. All this one-sided gift-giving makes

Annie's Mailbox

Creators Syndicate Inc.

Kathy Mitchell and Marcy Sugar



me feel like a charity case. I always accept the money and send an immediate thank-you note, and I will continue to do so. But other than my daughter, they are the only family I have. Their kids and I do not communicate. Is there any way to fix this? — *Bah Humbug*

Dear Humbug: You are interpreting your brother's attitude in the worst possible light. So, let's put it in a more positive one: Your brother and his wife know that you are struggling and they are not. They feel terrible when you spend your money on them. They are trying to be kind and thoughtful. They don't realize that you find this demeaning.

The age difference makes a relationship difficult and awkward, but you both seem to want to stay in contact, so here's our advice

for gift-giving: Do not give cash or gift cards. Instead, bake cookies or create a homemade holiday ornament. Write them a letter expressing how important they are to you, how much you hope to remain close, and that being able to reciprocate for their kindness brings you joy. That will mean more to them than any present.

Dear Annie: You've printed a few letters in response to the one from "W," who said her neighbor is overly sensitive to noise. This neighbor may have a mental health issue.

My ex-husband, who suffers from a fairly severe mental illness, often complained of excessive noise from our neighbor's adjoining townhouse, even though the sound would be perfectly fine to anyone else. He would call the police about it whenever he wasn't taking his anti-psychotic medication. It caused all sorts of problems.

"W." might consider speaking to the neighbor's son about her mental health. — *T.*

Dear T.: There are all kinds of reasons for noise sensitivity, and certainly mental health can play a role. Thank you for mentioning this possibility.

Tomorrow's horoscope

By Holiday Mathis, Creators Syndicate Inc.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). Your feelings matter to someone but not to everyone. So when they do exactly as they please, regardless of how you might feel about it, you'll waste no time lamenting and instead will focus on planning your next power move.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). You are in a quiet mood, but that won't keep you from drawing attention. In fact, there will be great deal of intrigue surrounding your silence. Think about what you're trying to say with it.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). Just as soon as you declare the thing you are certain of, you will cease to be so. That only proves that you're open-minded and you're growing. Your association with a Capricorn will heal you both.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). While others strive for a prize, you crave the sensation of winning and need no other incentive to try your hardest and work your best. Because of this, you'll get the prize and more.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). You'll be partnering up. The kindhearted, fun partner will be available, but think twice before you pick this one, as the task at hand may be better suited to a partner who could double as a bulldog.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). The people who ask for help when they don't really need it are wearing out the potential donors to worrier causes. That bothers you, as will all instances of greed and self-centeredness around you. Be the example they can follow.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Recent (overly) exciting events could have you craving a drama-free existence. The part of you that thought this would be glamorous is starting to get wise. Seek the company of grounded people, including earth signs.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). The day will come on rapid fire and you can totally stay ahead of it — that is, if you give up thinking (or at least over-thinking.) Yes, the intellect will only slow you down. Turn on the intuition and start surfing.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Are you feeling suddenly smarter, lighter, freer? That's because a problem you've been hanging on to in the very corner of your psyche is now a non-issue. It basically flew away.

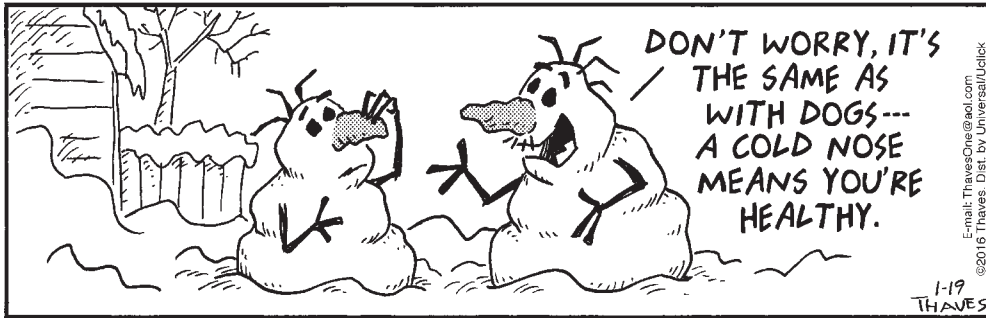
CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Because you love so many people, there is a levity to your affection. You make it easy to enter and exit your presence, which makes them feel free and happy to visit you often.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). You communicate with your presence. The thought you put into matters of presentation, including sartorial and environmental choices, will make a remarkable difference in the outcome.

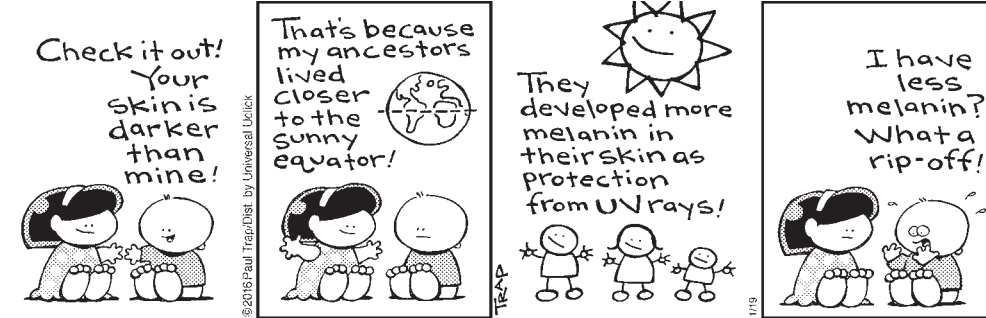
PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). While you may hit low pockets of sadness and less-than-optimum moods, there are others in your midst at the very nadir of their suffering. Hearing a small piece of someone else's troubles will free you from your own.

WEDNESDAY'S BIRTHDAY (Jan. 20). The practical efforts you make to feel more secure down deep in your soul will pay off handsomely throughout the year. In March, however, your main focus becomes more whimsical. It will be increasingly important to exercise your imagination, and then put money and time behind that. Confessions of love in May. Leo and Scorpio adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 2, 20, 44, 18 and 5.

FRANK AND ERNEST



THATABABY



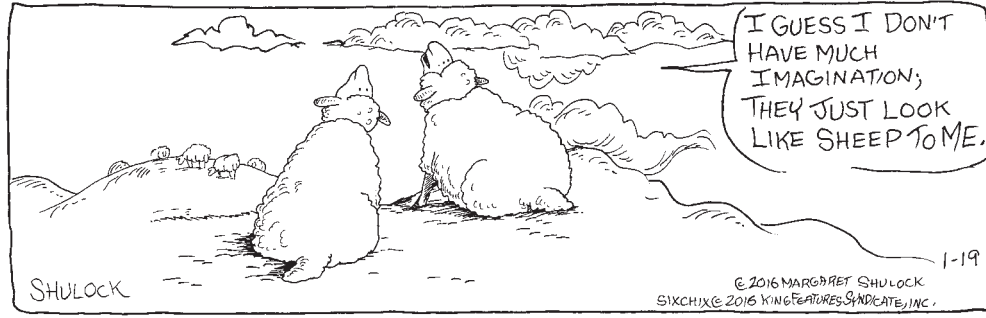
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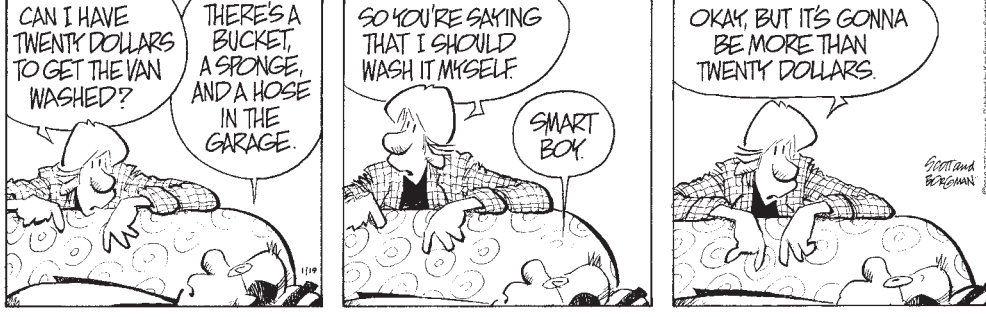
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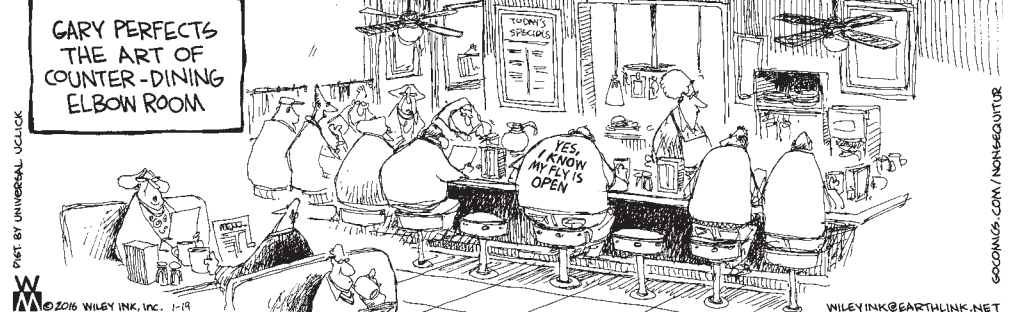
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ROSE IS ROSE

