

Feeling like a holiday Grinch

Dear Annie: For the past few years, my sister, her family, my husband and I have been donating at Christmastime to an animal shelter in our area. We are old enough to really want nothing for Christmas, so we donate to those who aren't so fortunate as we are. It makes our giving complete.

For the past few years, we have had Christmas at my stepdaughter's home a few hours away. We tell them in advance that we will be donating to an animal shelter and ask that they do, too, instead of giving us gifts.

But on Christmas Day, there under the tree will be gifts from all of them to both of us, and we bring nothing for them. It really makes us feel out of sorts. They don't seem to understand when we say that the only thing we want as a gift is for them to donate to an animal shelter. Is there a way we could make ourselves feel more gracious for receiving the gifts they get for us? Should we bring gifts for them? I know that after going through this for a few years, we should get the hint, but our hearts aren't in it. — *Feel Like a Grinch*

Dear Grinch: I commend your charitable intentions, but we don't get to decide what gifts we receive. The most we can do is share our wishes, which you've already done several times. It seems this family simply enjoys watching loved ones unwrap presents.

You do not have to reciprocate with material gifts. But if you feel so uncomfortable showing up empty-handed that it spoils your time, it might be worth it for your own peace of mind to bring a little something. It doesn't have to be extravagant — perhaps a small gift from a company that donates proceeds to a charity you like.

Dear Annie: I live in the Midwest. A few months ago, I took a part-time job as a valet at a nearby casino hotel to help supplement my regular income. I have consistently been courteous with the patrons. I have smiled, thanked them for coming and replied with a heartwarming "you're welcome" at every opportunity. However, most drivers will not offer a tip.

I have gone to their parked cars to retrieve forgotten cellphones, cigarettes, wallets and various

other personal items, yet I seldom receive more than a "thank you."

I am very grateful for the drivers who do tip. Unfortunately, there are not enough of these kind and generous people to make it worthwhile for me to keep working here, given the meager salary. I have given my two-week notice because I have found another part-time job.

I write this letter in the hope that you will bring this to public light. Maybe a few readers will realize that valets are very dependent on tips to provide a reasonable income. I do not advocate tipping for insufficient service, but when excellent service is provided, I cannot fathom why anyone would not offer a tip. — *Valet No More*

Dear Valet: Perhaps it's the venue. When someone is leaving a casino having just gambled away three months' worth of mortgage payments, the last thing he wants to do is hand over more money. But that doesn't make it OK to stiff someone who is just trying to make an honest living. Thanks for the reminder that if you're looking to save money, cutting back on tips isn't a fair or even efficient method. Instead, start by going out to bars and restaurants (and definitely casinos) less often.

TOMORROW'S HOROSCOPE

By Holiday Mathis, Creators Syndicate Inc.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). Among the saddest things imaginable in your book is unexpressed potential. You hate to see it in others, and it's physically painful when it's stored inside of you. So, what is keeping you from expressing it?

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). Just as food becomes much more valuable after it's being denied, some values only become strongly relevant when challenged. You'll be inspired to fight for ideas you thought everyone shared. It turns out, everyone doesn't.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). One way some people deal with problems is to become skillful at concealing the difficulty involved. Stay aware of the person who wants you to think that all is well or much better. This person may really need your help.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). There are those you need to experience for a while so you can get used to the way they act. You may never understand them, but if you can predict them, then you'll be more comfortable and able to peacefully coexist.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). Feeling in control of your time is a key element of happiness. Extremely practical steps toward better time management will help you find your smile again.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Rejection implies previous acceptance. Therefore, strangers cannot truly reject one another. If it's not a good fit, try to find this out early and move on. Put all relevant information on the table before you get too involved.

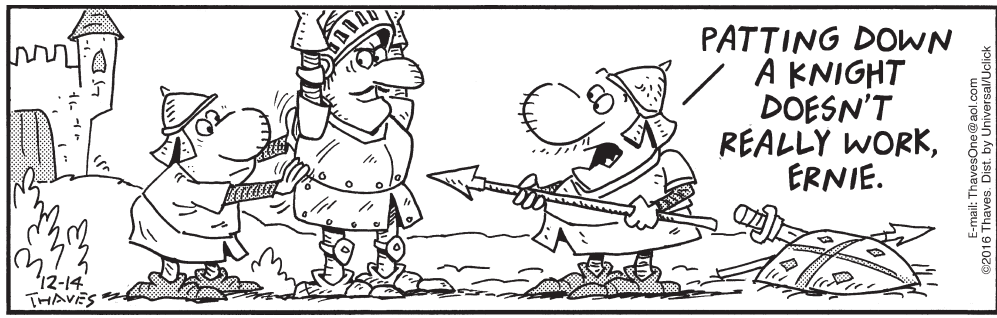
LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Everyone needs a place to feel safe. Some are safe in small places, some in wide-open spaces. People can provide the emotional equivalent of this. You recognize when people are uncomfort-

able and try to help.
SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). There are etiquette rules for everything. You'll lead with your deep respect for the others around you, and though you may not do things the technically proper way, you'll generate good feelings. That's what matters most.
SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Because of your efforts to be a very clear and present communicator, you will minimize misinterpretation and misunderstanding. All of your energy is focused on problem-solving.
CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). At some point, you tire of trying to figure out people's motivations. You'll recharge in the natural world, which has the power to calm you while expecting nothing in return.
AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). The value you assign yourself is just an opinion, and one that, like all opinions, is subject to change. So why rate yourself at all then? Give the judge the day off, and see if you're not a whole lot happier.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). Logical and ethical behavior is the bare minimum for getting along in civilized society. But when it comes to making friends, social efforts must reach much, much further into the realm of emotional intelligence. Don't worry; you're a pro.

TOMORROW'S BIRTHDAY (Dec. 15). The start of this year features your finding soft places to land. You deserve some comfort and lots of love, which you'll soak in before going to the next spot. Your aim toward perfect professionalism will extend to and enhance other parts of your life. May and July feature romance and getting out of your usual routine. Leo and Libra adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 6, 12, 10, 45 and 20.

FRANK AND ERNEST



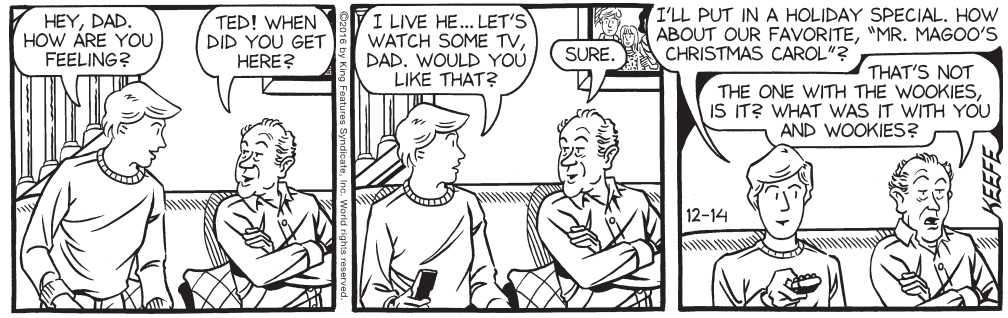
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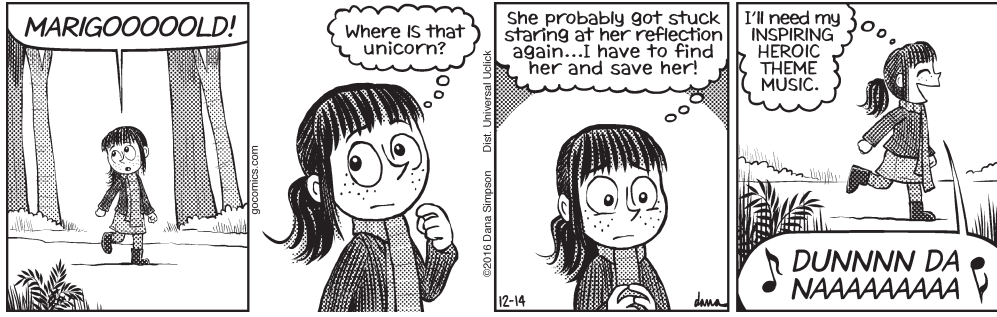
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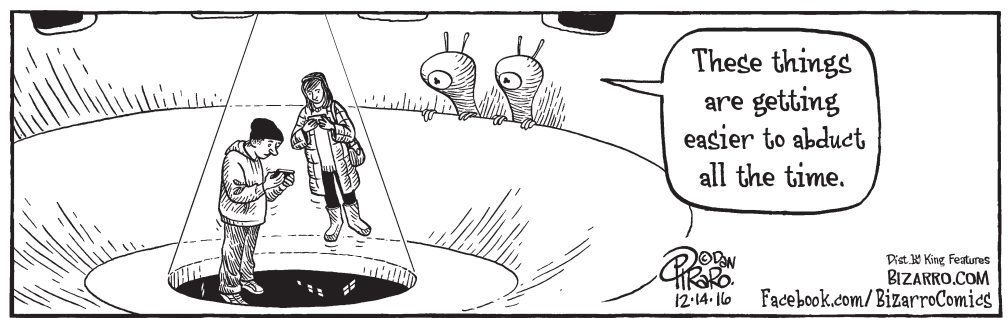
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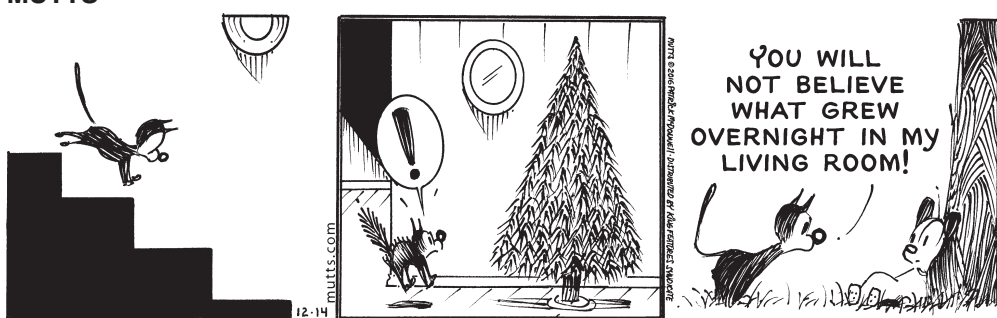
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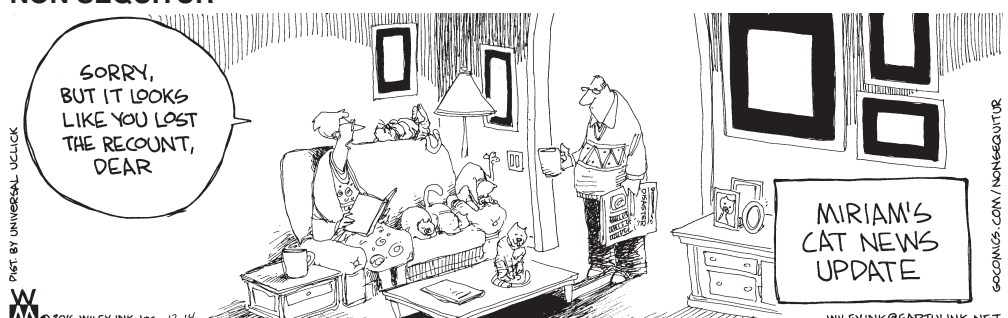
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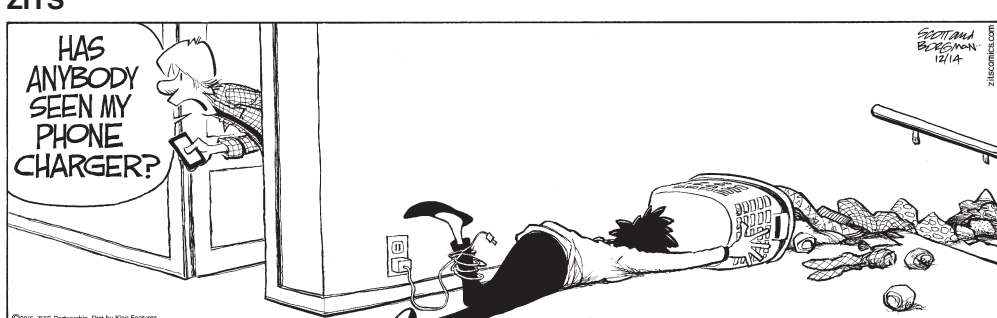
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