

Sisters' kinship deteriorates

Dear Annie: I have lived within a day's drive of my eldest sister for many years. Several years ago, as she was getting back on her feet after a divorce, I went to visit for Christmas. I had a great time. But after that, things seemed to get progressively tenser with each visit.

She started participating as a foster parent for infants and canceled a Christmas visit to us on short notice because she had to look after her first child over the holiday. I tried to be supportive of her new endeavor, but when I asked about the family situation that put the child in foster care, I was snippily told, "That's confidential. I can't talk about that."

She is hurt that I am ignoring her now. But she has yet to invite us for a visit since canceling the Christmas visit several years ago. Email communication gets twisted, and she doesn't call by phone. She signs her emails, "May God bless your day," and when I told her that bothers me, she got very defensive.

Even if she were to invite me, I'm not sure I would want to go.

If it were a short trip to see her for a short visit, I think I could manage that. But it's an eight-hour trip, and then I would be captive to her rules for a couple of days. It's more than I could handle. I am not really interested in staying in a motel in order to visit. And I have had enough of God blessing my day. What am I missing? — *Puzzled*

Dear Puzzled: First, I don't think there's any puzzle piece that would click and snap everything into place along with it. Your sister's behavior has very little to do with you and everything to do with where she is on her own path.

Perhaps you two could plan a trip somewhere halfway between your town and hers. The neutral ground might help you both relax. Try engaging her in an open and judgment-free conversation. Tell her that you're proud of her for committing to taking care of a foster child, and ask her how that idea came to her. Seek to understand.

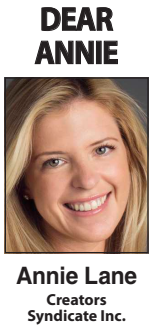
And keep in mind that in the aftermath of her divorce, your sister could have gone in any number of dark directions. Instead, she

found solace in faith and charity. Good for her.

Dear Annie: I've recently read some letters to you about servers in restaurants. Personally, one thing that grates on my ears like fingernails on a chalkboard is when a server addresses me and says, "How are we?" Then he or she asks, "Are we ready to order?"

I can't stand the "we" thing. Servers are not part of our experience, other than waiting on us. Is this something new training includes, or is it a personal choice? I've even gone so far as to ask why my server used "we," but I don't remember what the answer was. At any rate, I'd sure prefer it if they said, "How are you?" and "Are you ready to order?" — *Annoyed Patron*

Dear Annoyed Patron: Servers' livelihoods depend on tips, and studies have shown that personable little gestures from a server, such as drawing a smiley face on the check, inspire patrons to leave bigger tips. Warmth is rewarded. So that might explain the "How are we?" phenomenon. I get that it peeves you, but try to empathize with your server rather than be irritated by her. She's just doing her job.



Annie Lane
Creators
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TOMORROW'S HOROSCOPE

By Holiday Mathis, Creators Syndicate Inc.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). Your allies and your adversaries are strong, and ultimately this is the stroke of good fortune that helps you to stay strong yourself. A worthy opponent is a great blessing.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). The shortest distance between two points is a straight line, something that pretty much never occurs naturally. For instance, your personal path will curve, switchback, pitch up and down — but it's all progress.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). Why do you find it so much easier to be wise for others than for yourself? Because when you give advice, you're not the one who has to follow it. But if you do choose to follow your own advice now, it will lead to fast success.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). You'll celebrate the big events when they come up, but don't wait for big events to celebrate. The silly, small events will be more memorable. Anyway, why do you even need a reason to revel in all that's good?

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). You'll be making "notes to self" all day long. It will help you to write them down, or you're likely to forget. You're onto something; you just don't know what it is quite yet. Look at what you've covered and where you're going next.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). No one will think any less of you if you stick to your values even when the cool kids are smoking in the bathroom (or whatever the grownup version of that is). Your integrity makes you more than cool; it makes you hot.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). It is better to try and fail than to do nothing and succeed. Take a chance. The more you risk rejection and

emotional injury, the easier it gets. The easier it gets, the bigger your life becomes.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). There are things you'd like to do that never seem to fit into your schedule. That's how you know that they are not really the important things. You always have time for what is truly important to you.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Big breakthroughs rarely come — a few times in a lifetime for the lucky. Most accomplishments are the result of incremental efforts, building momentum by chalking up a little progress each day.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Your friendships will open doors, bring out your best and bring you great joy. As Capricorn President Woodrow Wilson said, "Friendship is the only cement that will ever hold the world together."

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). What holds the skyscraper up is buried hundreds of feet deep in the ground; the taller the building, the deeper the foundation. Be patient with your own building process. You won't show signs of height so much as depth.

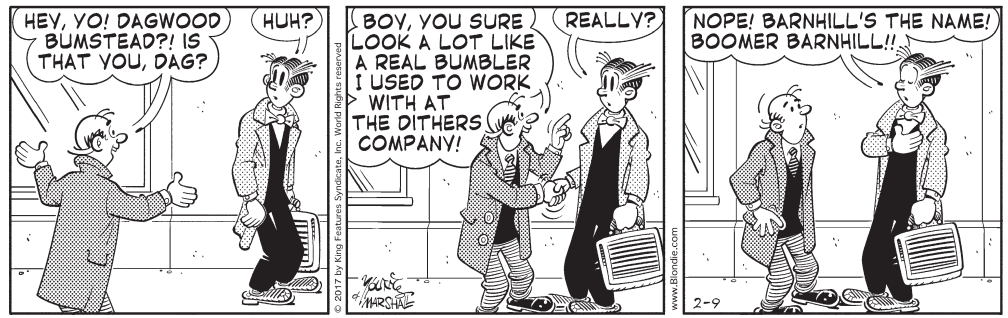
PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). It is easy to mistake imagination for ego. Both tend to work in the language of illusions and distortions. Much depends on who is at the center of the fantasy.

TOMORROW'S BIRTHDAY (Feb. 2). Let people spoil you like they want to this month, even though you don't need all of the fuss. They'll be better off for the energetic investment, and more attached to you, too. A new talent blossoms in March. April brings a move. Love has you doing unexpected things in July. A windfall happens in October. Libra and Capricorn adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 21, 38, 4, 6, and 44.

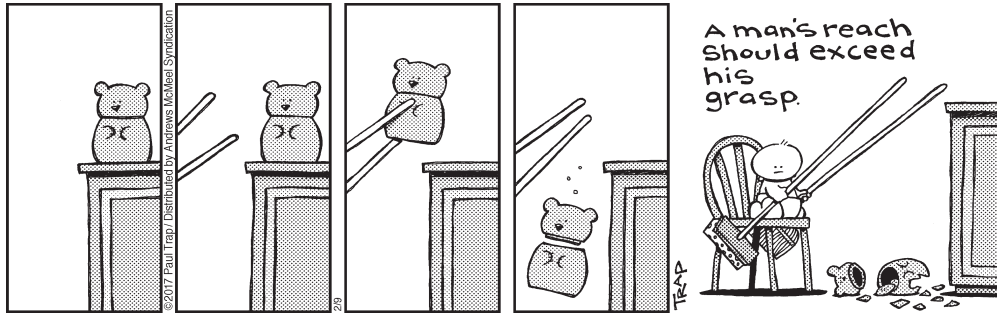
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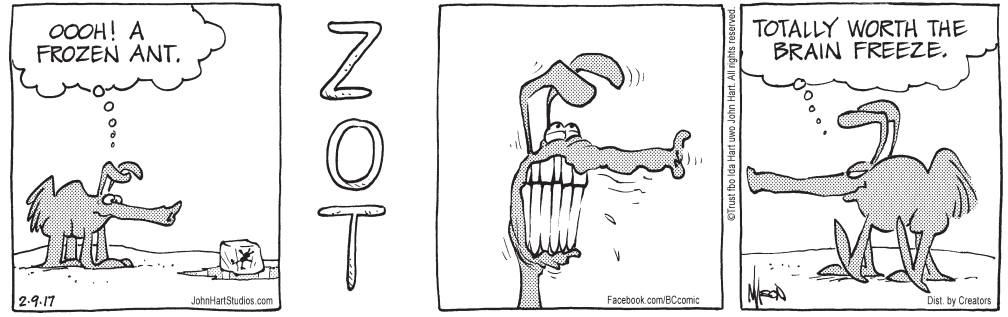
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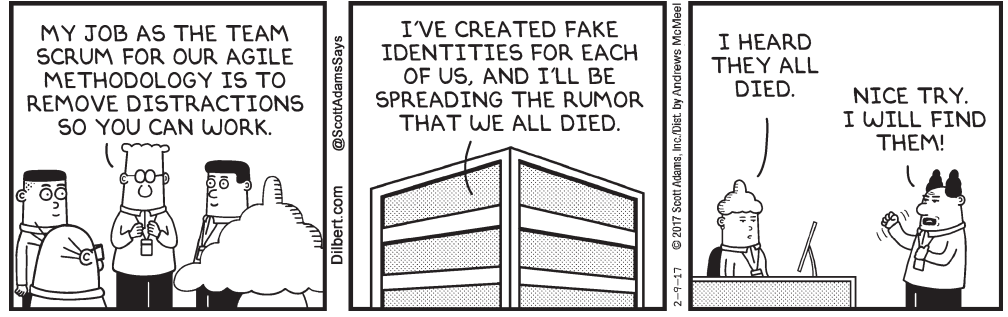
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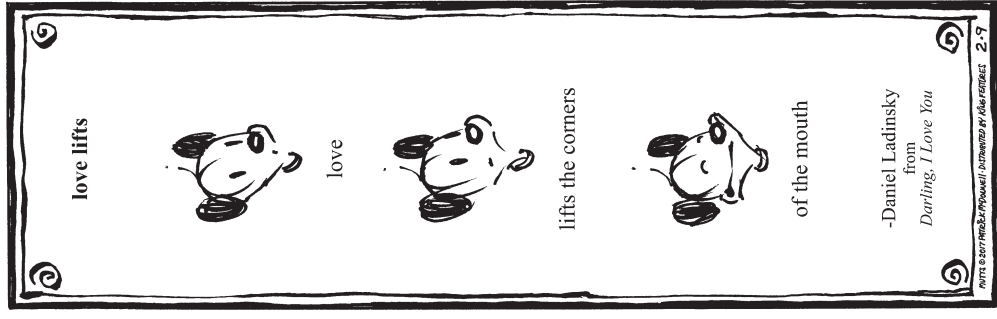
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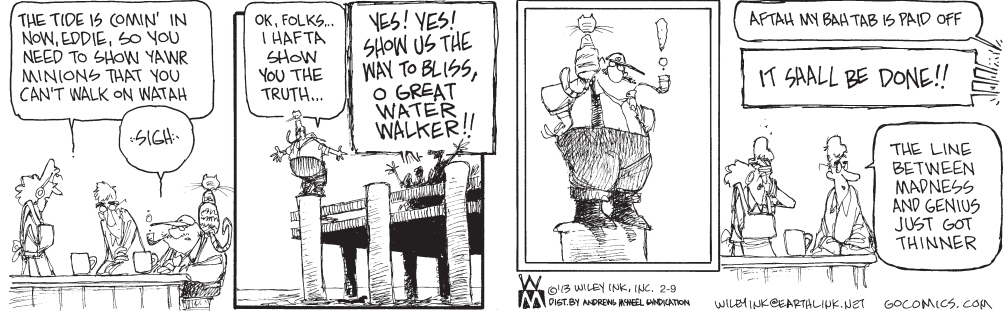
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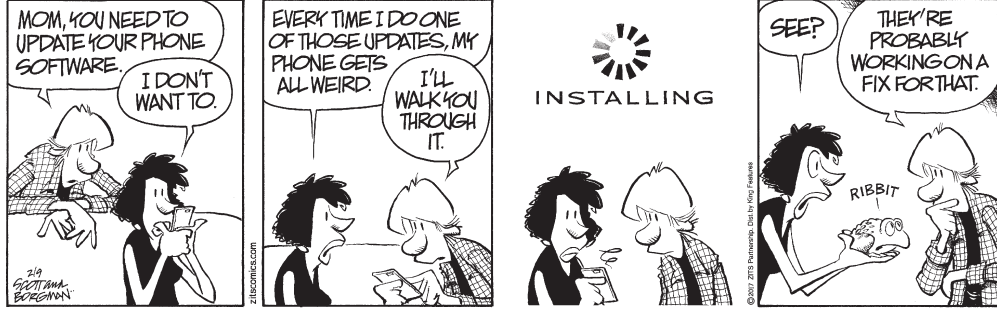
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