

Dad feels no love for stepson

Dear Annie: I am a 42-year-old man with two teenage sons. I have been married to my second wife for almost a year. She has an 11-year-old son, "Brice."

Brice never had a man in his life until I married his mom. He is respectful and a sweet kid, but for some reason, I hate him. I know that sounds harsh, and I am actually ashamed at how I feel, but I cannot seem to warm up to him.

My sons are 14 and 16. They are your typical rough-and-tumble boys. They are into sports, girls and cars. I suppose I am used to that behavior in boys.

Brice, on the other hand, is extremely effeminate and sensitive. He would rather be inside reading a book or helping his mom in the kitchen. I came home from work the other day, and he was in an apron helping her bake cookies. I could barely look at him.

I have tried numerous times to get him interested in the things most boys his age are doing, such as playing catch in the backyard. He cries and complains and says how much he hates sports.

My sons have also tried to get him to do things with them, but he will complain the entire time that he hates the outdoors. They pretty much have given up on him. They say he is a whiner and a crybaby.

If I am out somewhere with him and I run into a friend or co-worker, I am actually embarrassed to introduce him as my stepson because of how he acts.

I know I need counseling or something, but I am too ashamed to talk to anyone and admit I feel what I feel. Is there anything you can suggest? — *Ashamed and Terrible Stepdad*

Dear Ashamed and Terrible Stepdad: Many people believe that if you feel that you hate someone, you actually hate something about yourself that you recognize in the other person. Perhaps when you were a child, an adult made you feel bad about some aspect of your personality that wasn't stereotypically masculine. Whatever the source of these feelings, a counselor could help you work through them and past them, confidentially and without judgment. You don't need to tell anyone why

you're going to counseling — but you do need to go, for your sake and for Brice's. Children pick up on feelings.

Dear Annie: This is in response to "Desperate in Montana," who compulsively flirts with men. From the time I reached adulthood, I inexplicably found myself sexualizing interactions, totally outside my control. I was horrified, anxious and scared by this. Eventually, I did find its origin. I had been repressing a terrible episode of assault in my childhood. When I stopped fighting the sexualizing impulse and turned to face it, I eventually remembered.

I understand now that the reason my subconscious was so relentlessly "dinging" was that it was now safe and necessary for me to remember. "Desperate" has to have compassion for herself. She needs to begin a quest for a counselor who can work with her and her subconscious. I pray she finds peace. — *Louisiana Reader*

Dear Louisiana Reader: I've passed your letter on to "Desperate," and I'm printing it here for anyone who has lived through such trauma. Thank you for opening up, and I'm so glad you've found healing.

DEAR ANNIE

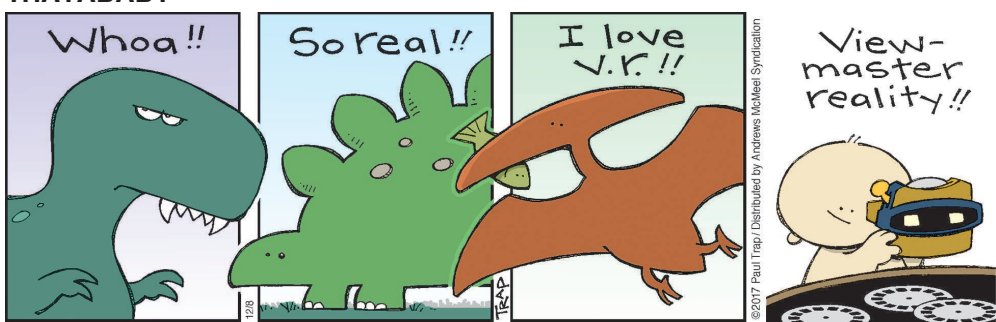


Annie Lane
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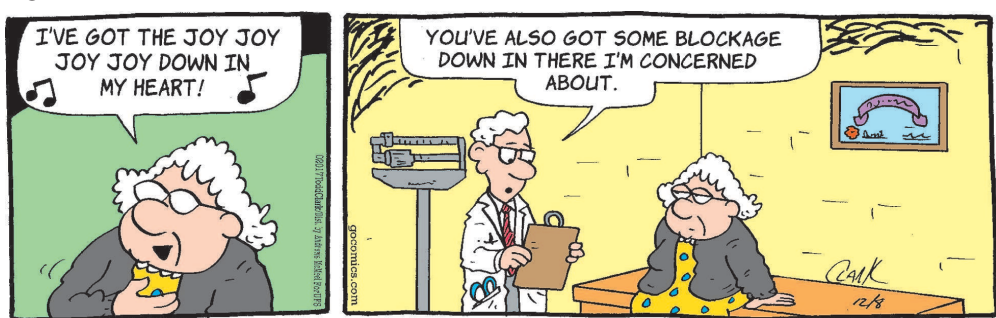
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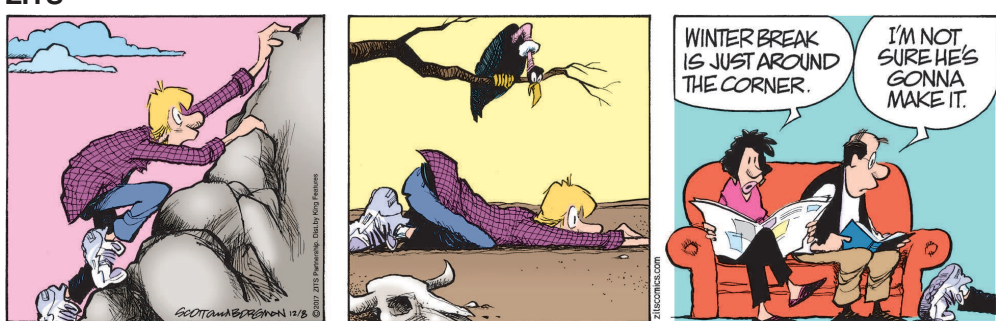
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TOMORROW'S HOROSCOPE

By Holiday Mathis, Creators Syndicate Inc.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). The first rule of professionalism is not to ask others to do your work. The second rule is to adhere to the training manual. If you weren't trained, it's not your fault, but the true professional finds a way to get trained nonetheless.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). You agreed. You checked the box. That box included limitations that you will definitely outgrow and push against in time — as well as limitations that you are better off respecting. Knowing the difference, that's the thing.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). As you mix into the crowd, you'll be with all manner and types of people, most melding with your goodwill and positive intention; some, not so much. Just remember that all rudeness is essentially weakness or ignorance.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). You're not looking to blame anyone, though neither would you mind if someone else would step in and take responsibility for what's going on. It could actually happen ... miracle of miracles!

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). Avoid matters of religion and politics in polite company. Extend the taboo-topics list to finance, health, fashion, taste preferences in general and basically anything that highlights differences of opinion, ideology or belief.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). You've trepidation about tackling the events of the day, but that won't stop you. The upside of being afraid is an adrenaline rush — just what you need to take courage in the face of fear.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). You'll use the past to reference where you are. That's the proper use of it, after all. To use it as a refuge would make you smaller. To use it as your glory

would deny the excitement that is to come. **SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21).** Some say it isn't right to change the goal. Some say it signals weakness or failure. But not all goals are worthy. A worthy goal is the water that raises all ships.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Your success today will depend on your ability to compartmentalize and manage your emotions, including the very subtle, almost non-emotion of boredom.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). It's not that everyone wants or needs to be included in the shenanigans; it's just that everyone wants to feel invited. Handle the invites in a highly inclusive manner and you'll be a social success.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). There's something new on the horizon that will not fully rise if not for your input. You can't imagine how important you are to this right now, but hopefully you won't doubt it, either.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). Shakespeare suggested, "Better three hours too soon than a minute too late." In his time, three hours (without a cellphone!) must have been excruciating. However, he has a point. And you'll earn many points for a timely arrival.

TOMORROW'S BIRTHDAY (Dec. 9). Maybe it's because you teach and you give. Or maybe it's because you rarely complain and find it quite natural to inspire others. Whichever it is, you'll enjoy a solar return that includes you being very well-liked and well-compensated in all the ways that matter to you. Exciting news comes in May. Travel comes in October. Capricorn and Gemini adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 12, 22, 20, 3 and 33.

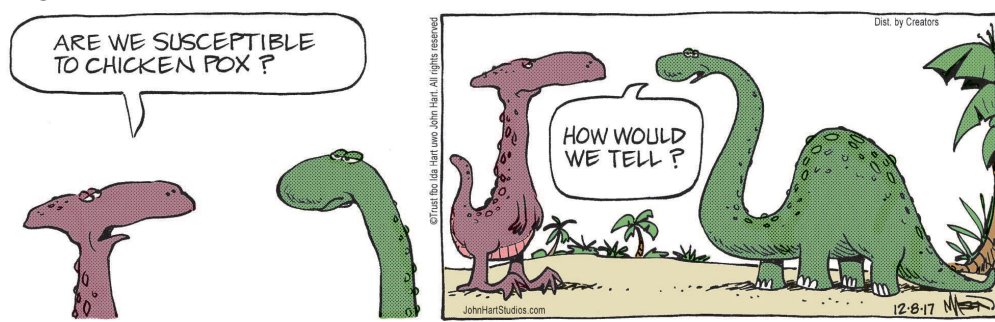
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ROSE IS ROSE

