

Sister plays the victim

Dear Annie: Ever meet someone who plays the victim and always needs a villain in her life? We have a sister (baby of the family) who grew up in the South and then married a nice guy from New England, and they moved there over 20 years ago. At first, she complained about the weather, the lack of sunshine and how the people were different — which was to be expected after such an abrupt change in her life. However, she's grown increasingly angry and hostile over the years. Her first villains were her two sisters-in-law who lived nearby. Those relationships were destroyed, and our brother-in-law now has zero contact with his two brothers. And of course, it was "their fault."

Her next villain was our mother back in Florida, with our dad or sister serving as referee. Anytime she visited Florida, things blew up. Our mom and dad are now gone, and now I, her elder brother, have become the villain. Our family is in Florida, so I'm a "long-distance" villain.

Her complaint is that "our families are not close," and she says it's my fault. "You make no attempt to see us," she says. (We've visited her homes six times in 20 years. She's been to our home once, during our daughter's wedding weekend.) "I feel disrespected" is another one I hear a lot. We do not know whether she is miserable because of her family life, her inability to fit in or her lack of close girlfriends. It also could be something deeper. Chemical imbalance? Meds or lack thereof? Substance abuse? Lack of sunshine? Is there anything we can do or suggest? Our thought was to write to you and send your reply to her. She obviously needs some professional help. — *No Interest in Being the Villain*

Dear No Interest in Being the Villain: If only it were the lack of sunshine. Your sister needs much more than a UV lamp. It sounds as though you've been able to avoid taking her attacks too personally, as you have enough distance, mentally and physically, to see this pattern of behavior for what it is.

That's good. Defense mechanisms are at once debilitating and protective. What this victim complex is protecting your sister from, I can't say for sure. That's a topic best explored in therapy, and you might encourage her to give therapy a try. But do so with love. Purge every trace of condescension from your tone before picking up the phone. I know the victim routine is extremely frustrating, but antagonizing her would only cast you both deeper into your roles.

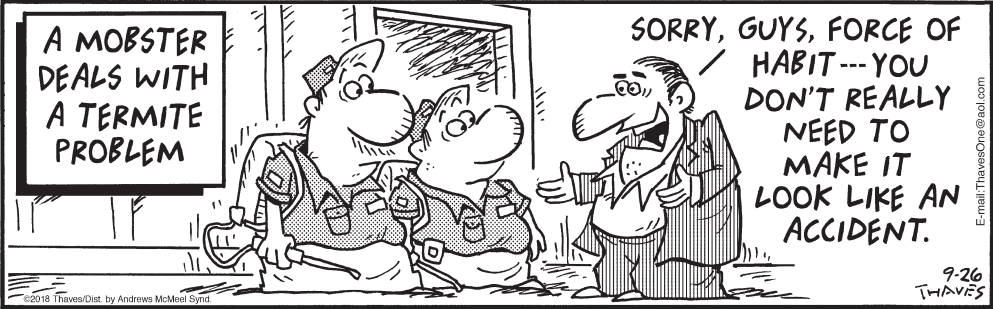
Dear Annie: Why do authors have to use the F-word in their books? It turns me off! Do they think they are cute? They are cheap!

My family never used bad words, and when I am reading, I want to read a good story, not something that makes me sick. Thank you. — *Love to Read, Canfield, Ohio*

Dear Love to Read: I don't know, but I've also noticed a proliferation of F-bombs in literature and other media in recent years. I'm with you. Usually, anything said with the F-word could be better said without it. More than anything, it's lazy.



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