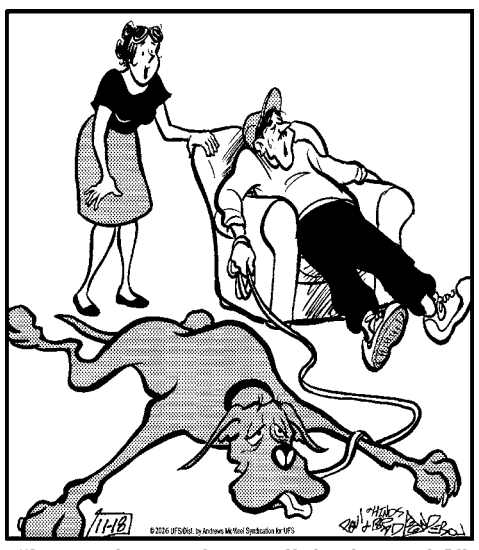
# COMICS

MARMADUKE




"It wasn't exactly a walk in the park?"

HERMAN



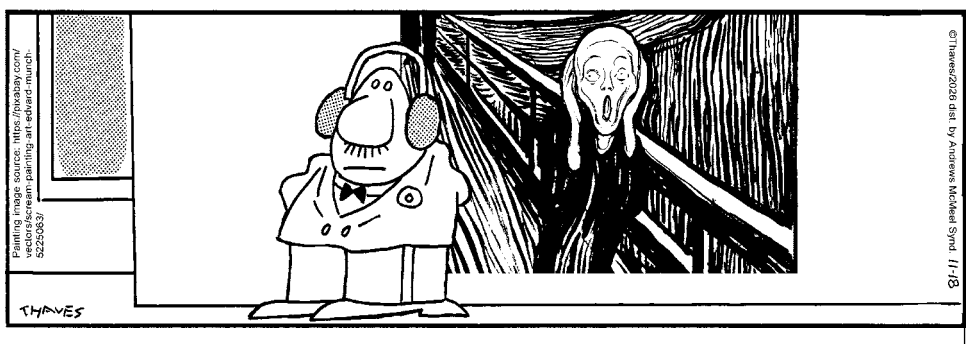

REALITY CHECK




MODERATELY CONFUSED



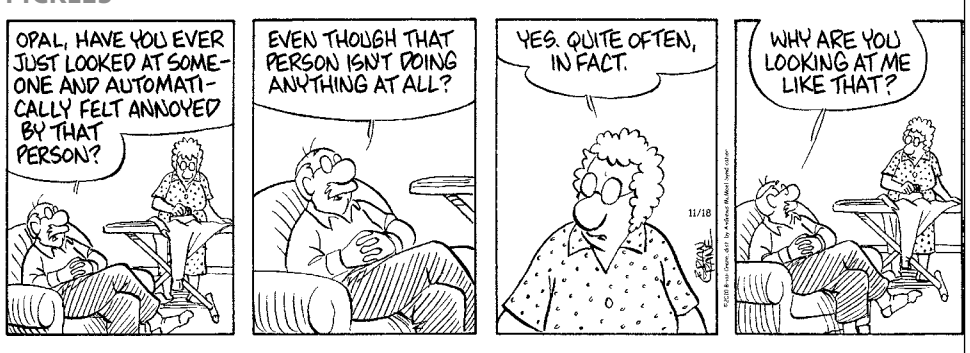

FRANK & ERNEST



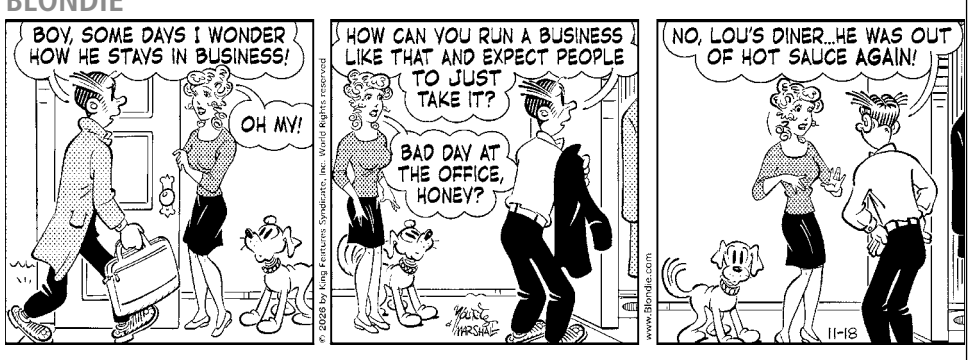

THE GRIZZWELLS




PICKLES



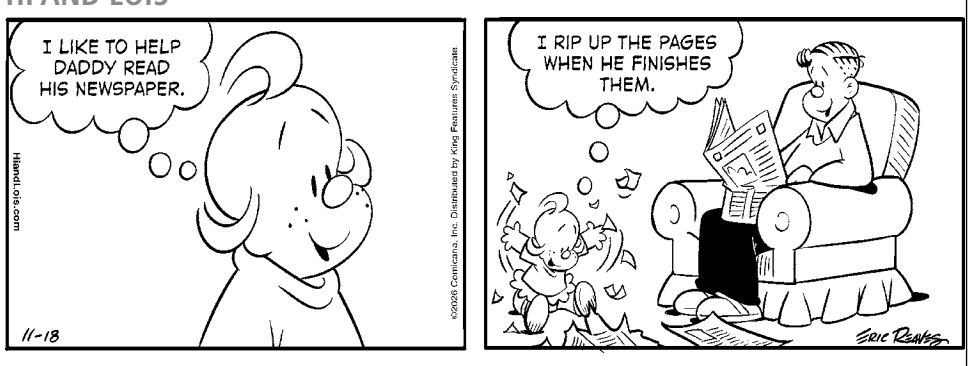

BLONDIE



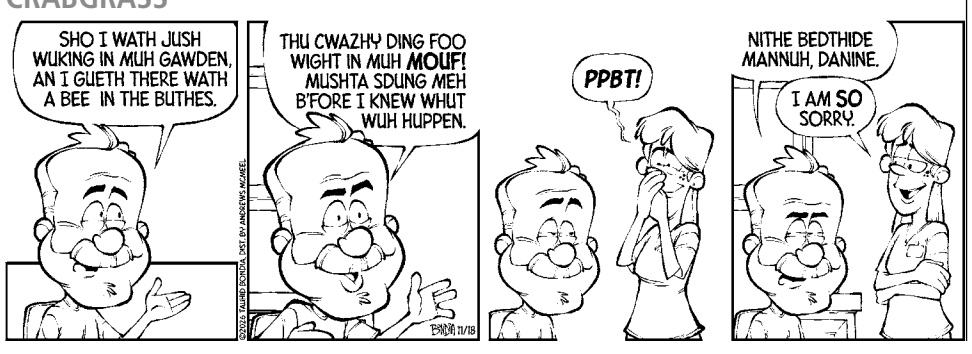

BORN LOSER




HI AND LOIS




CRABGRASS




# Left on Read After a Summer Fling



ANNIE LANE

Dear Annie

Dear Annie: I recently met a wonderful woman while on vacation, and what started as a casual conversation turned into something neither of us expected. We spent several days together, laughing, talking for hours and feeling a connection that seemed almost too good to be true. There was chemistry, but there was also something deeper. We talked about our families, our lives and even the possibility of seeing each other again.

When we returned home, the connection continued. We texted throughout the day, exchanged good morning and good night messages, and shared little details about our lives. She seemed just as interested as I was. Sometimes she even initiated the conversations. I found myself looking forward to hearing from her, and I began to believe this might actually turn into something meaningful.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, everything changed.

Her messages became shorter and less frequent. The woman who once couldn't wait to talk to me suddenly seemed too busy to respond. At first, I told myself she was probably overwhelmed with work or life. But days have passed, and I'm beginning to feel like I'm chasing someone who no longer wants to be caught.

What hurts the most is that nothing happened. There was no argument, no awkward conversation, no explanation. Just a sudden change in someone who had made me feel special.

I know we only spent a short time together, but the feelings were real to me. I keep replaying our conversations, wondering if I said something wrong or misunderstood the connection.

Should I ask her directly what changed, or should I take her silence as my answer? How do you stop hoping for a message from someone who once seemed so excited to hear from you? -- Left Waiting by the Phone

Dear Left Waiting by the Phone: One of the hardest things about falling for someone is realizing that just because a connection felt special doesn't mean both people are ready to make something of it.

What you experienced may have been very real. But vacation romances sometimes fade when everyday life takes over.

My advice is to reach out once, kindly and directly, and ask if something has changed. Then step back. You deserve clarity, but you shouldn't have to chase someone to get it.

And please don't mistake her silence for a reflection of your worth. Chemistry brings people together, but consistency is what builds a relationship.

Remember, the right person won't leave you constantly wondering where you stand. You can miss someone, hope to hear from them and still choose to move forward.

Sometimes the hardest part of letting go isn't losing the person. It's letting go of the future we imagined with them.

"Out of Bounds: Estrangement, Boundaries and the Search for Forgiveness" is out now! Annie Lane's third anthology is for anyone who has lived with anger, estrangement or the deep ache of being wronged -- because forgiveness isn't for them. It's for you. Visit http://www.creatorspublishing.com for more information. Follow Annie Lane on Instagram at @dearannieofficial. Send your questions for Annie Lane to dearannie@creators.com.

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## ASTROGRAPH BY EUGENIA LAST

Happy Birthday: Cherish every moment with the people you love and the pastimes that bring you joy. Make decisions based on needs, not emotions. Being responsible will encourage less stress and offer a mindful lifestyle that offers peace and love, not havoc and chaos. Recognize your potential, and live up to your expectations. When you live within your means and move forward with a positive attitude, the universe opens and opportunities unfold.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 22) -- Spend time nurturing what and who you love. Refuse to let others talk you into something that doesn't resonate with you. Take the path that liberates you from giving in and letting others take advantage of you.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 23-Dec. 21) -- Pocket your money and emotions before you go out the door. Don't buy into lavish sales pitches that promise the impossible. Explore possibilities, and broaden your vision through research and networking.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) -- Use your resources wisely. Whether it's your expertise, knowledge, connections or cash, keep your intentions and assets undercover. Don't expect others to be up-front.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 19) -- Channel your energy into something meaningful. Protect what you have, and initiate your intentions. Let others discover what you have to offer through word of mouth and social media.

PISCES (Feb. 20-March 20) -- Emotions will be difficult to hide. Stick to facts; if you fabricate information, it will put you in a vulnerable position that will lead to regret. Focus on truth, authenticity and your passion.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) -- Digging into your past and letting memories surface will help you see situations clearly. A financial gain will require logic and planning to ensure it meets your needs without causing grief.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) -- Taking on too much will be taxing. Step back, evaluate your situation and move forward with a reasonable plan. It's OK to say no or to walk away from situations that have no promise.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20) -- Be careful what you wish for. Emotions can get you in trouble, especially if there is a hefty ego tagging along. Sift through the rhetoric to determine what the best option is before you choose to participate.

CANCER (June 21-July 22) -- Speak up or accept the consequences. Challenge, question and be brave enough to walk away from anyone trying to push you in a direction that doesn't fit your agenda.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) -- Be careful what you offer. Don't let your generous spirit lead to regret. Learn from mistakes, and change your mindset from wanting everyone to adore you to wanting respect for your way of conducting yourself.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) -- You don't need change; you need to spend more time preparing, presenting and promoting what you feel most passionate about. Explore possibilities, and engage in conversations that open doors to new beginnings.

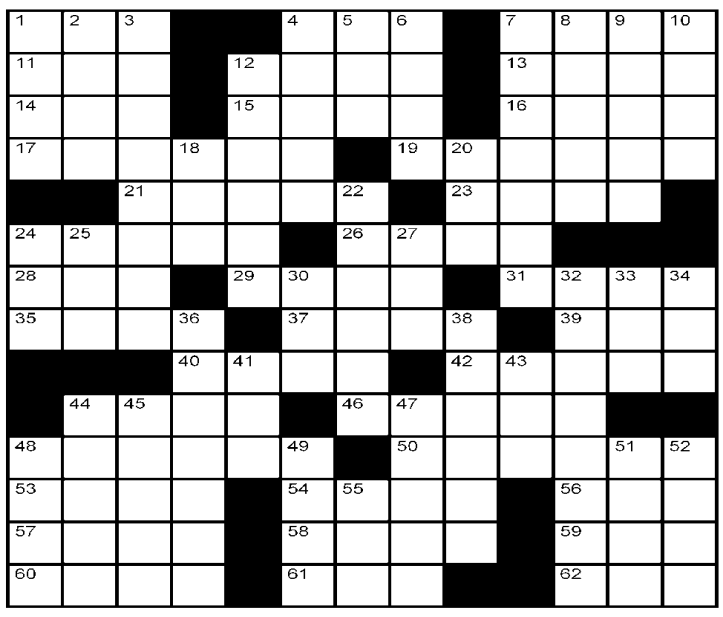
LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23) -- If you participate in groups that share your concerns and agenda, the opportunity to act in unison with others will turn into something very different from what you expect.

**ACROSS**

1 Valentine's Day mo.
4 Piece
7 Female animal
11 — de parfum
12 Sand mound
13 Freshly
14 Serpentine letter
15 Top-notch (Hyph.)
16 Writer Edgar — Burroughs
17 Like maple syrup
19 Soft speech
21 Loop in a lariat
23 Bridge support
24 Fragrance
26 Bouquet holder
28 Dawn goddess
29 Like a missing GI
31 Wound result
35 Fling
37 Related
39 — de Janeiro
40 Hamster's home
42 White poplar
44 Dross
46 Desiccated
48 Blind drunk
50 Most senior
53 Plunder
54 Competent
56 Sgt., for one
57 Domed church area
58 Warty amphibian
59 Rotating part
60 Suds in a mug
61 Scarecrow stuffing
62 Decline

**DOWN**

1 Costs
2 "— of Eden"
3 "Risky —"
4 Keeps afloat
5 Hotel
6 Abound
7 Weds
8 Japanese cartoon genre
9 Happen again
10 Pitcher
12 Actress — Fanning
18 Swindle
20 FedEx rival
22 Drew forth
24 Harden
25 Bill and —
27 Boxing great
30 Move back and forth
32 Belief
33 Feel poorly
34 Caviar
36 Disperse
38 Fastened a certain way
41 Literary rep.
43 Planting spot
44 Incline
45 Baggy
47 Send along
48 Spill the beans
49 Solemn promise
51 Strikebreaker
52 Burial place
55 Feather scarf



11-18

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**Answer to this puzzle**

