

Meredith Takes Manhattan

Written by
Estevan B. Muñoz

"Fascination is the death of blandness," mused Meredith Magpie Muggenheimer, under her breath, neck craned over the Sudoku puzzle she'd been seduced by earlier that muggy, Manhattan morning. Just yesterday, Misses Muggenheimer, that behemoth human factory of useless milestones churned out at delirious speeds, had completed a crossword puzzle she found under her bed in a dusty newspaper. This paper was published one million years ago. The theme of the crossword, a rather fitting one for the facetiously ambitious Meredith, was frivolous obsessions. "Meredith!," screamed a hollow voice from somewhere inside the crusty, brick apartment. "The meat-pie has maggots in it. Again!". The culprit of such crude cries was Meredith's husband Hank, a painfully pragmatic peon who had been balding since he was a baby. Hank did not take kindly to Meredith's masterful application of all that was futile, nor did he take kindly to these unexpected visits from cross-eyed insects in his steaming Sunday brunches, a common consequence of Meredith's own culinary negligence. To which had bothered her zilch. "Just a mi-mi-mi-minute!" answered the gentlewoman Magpie, not intending for a single moment to step her paws out of that fetid bedroom until her Sudoku puzzle had sung for the fat lady. Hank sighed enormously and the crevices so severely sculpted into his sandpaper forehead became just a little more permanent. He understood full well that his wily wife was not going to fix this, and he was probably going to resort to eating bird feeder again. The truth was that, despite warped, bygone ideals regarding home meals and wives, Hank Gulliver was essentially as innocent as an eraser head and as decent as any apple core you may pluck from any Saturday Market aisle. On some days, Hank could even put the notoriously virginal North Arctic Penguins a run for their money in any contest measuring prudence-ness or principles. His dilemma, however, was more that his imagination had been savagely murdered after a weary childhood spent on a farm. The pastry-face'd patriarch of said farm would proudly proclaim far-fetched absurdities, things such as that outer-space didn't exist or that any U.S. President across history was Sweet Baby Jesus incarnate. "The sun is a light bulb and the moon is a light bulb with shoddy electrician work dagnabbit!" the dick head of the household often yelled, whilst the young Hank scrubbed his moping mother's back for black fungi. Despite these cosmically offensive shortcomings though, Hank was accomplished in his own sense, no matter how one-dimensional these accomplishments appeared to Meredith. He was skilled in plumber-ing, electrician-ing, carpenter-ing, knitter-ing, vacuumer-ing, Ralph Nader devotee-ing, and general responsibility-ing. Simply put, he worshiped all that was utilitarian and ignored the rest, with the rare exception of a brief, torrid affair with a ukulele he had in his 20's.

Three hours later, Meredith Magpie Muggenheimer penciled in the final, empty box of the last, crusty page of her Sudoku book, and whistled along with the crooning fat lady luxuriating by her blue duvet bedside. Twenty minutes after that, she sauntered into the cramped living room and stood directly in front of the television set, blocking the eye line of Hank, whose body was practically stitched into the rocking chair's linen. She motioned with her custom-designed, pink mouse dufflebag in her right hand. "I'm bugging the hootin' hell off Hank," said Meredith. "Don't forget to feed yourself now, and tell your mother I said hi. Then tell I said bye... I guess." And with that final declaration of rare resolute, she catapulted into the urban unknown that surrounded Hank and Her's crumbling apartment. Unfortunately, Hank, that otherwise cheerful idiot, was found three months later by a concerned milkman who had stumbled upon his rotting husk, in the same position Meredith last saw him in. Initial coronary reports suggest his jaw had dropped so far from the rest of his head that it became detached entirely, but closer examinations have found these certain statements inconclusive. Now, for Meredith, still very much alive and curious and questioning in a body aged by forgetful neglect, had spent the past decade of her life in that kingdom of

disarray one would call their old apartment. And suddenly, she found herself wandering cruel Manhattan, carrying around all that she had previously needed to feel okay in this sorry world: these took the space-time shape of puzzles, pajama's, a parakeet fact book, a Papa Roach CD, and the aqua-blue toenail polish she applied lustfully whenever feeling like celebrating her place in the cosmos. Woefully, due to her stubbornly neglectful nature of all that wasn't leisure, which manifested both brilliantly and horrendously in her private and public life, Meredith was unfathomably unskilled in basic maintenance. She was a virtuoso of avoidable vulnerabilities. Luckily, and she had much of this, thanks to her Jupiter conjunct Sun, she wandered her zig-zaggy path into an NYC mall with a gloriously greasy food court. Since never learning to cook anything except for hot dogs, Meredith survived, and indeed thrived, in this museum of processed yum-yum's: breakfast, brunch, lunch, linner, dinner, didnight dack, midnight snack, etc. She even found an abandoned water closet she hid in when security had locked up the place from the public at night. Now, her polka-dotted carpeted stage was set. With her gracefully living off a minor inheritance she was mistakenly granted because of a typo in a distant relative's will, Meredith had all the time and resources to devote to her one true love: the completion of needlessly completed puzzles. She became a celebrated and enigmatic staple to this community of consumers, winning the silent admiration of security guards, teeny-boppers, retail workers, and strange, bearded men who stood outside Hot Topic for hours, alike. Until one spotless Sunday morning, 33 years after leaving that cute curmudgeon Hank, in the farthest reaches and corners of the food court, Meredith Magpie Muggenheimer had completed a 3,000 piece puzzle of a clear blue sky. Moments later, she died of a sudden brain aneurysm.

A few online petitions from mall regulars campaigned for a Meredith Muggenheimer themed ice cream from her most frequented syrupy vendor, but support for this has sharply dwindled.

Long Live The Puzzling Queen of Tricks and Quirks!