

WHAT'S A CASPIAN FEEDER?

It's my sister's fault. She brings her filthy little habit into my home and the next thing you know, I'm desperate to know what a caspian feeder is! She lured me into her sick game with the skill of a deadly dealer. Sitting at my kitchen table with her paraphernalia in full view, with my innocent children looking on, she asked, "So, what's a word for mocking playfully?"

"Teasing," I tossed off without a backward glance.

"That's it!" she cried.

Then she had the nerve to ask a second question. "What's another word for hurl?"

"Uh, throw, fling," I guessed.

"FLING! You're right again," she said in amazement. "You're so smart."

I took the bait. I sidled over to her seat and casually glanced over her shoulder. "Type of duck that starts with L? That's gotta be lame, dontcha think?"

"You're a genius!" she gushed, reeling me right in.

The next thing I knew, I was hunched over the table, and rocking my head between my hands in a desperate attempt to shake some marbles loose. "What gratifies vanity? What kind of trees quake? What's a Milanese monetary unit? Someone help me!"

Before my sister forced her compulsion for crossword puzzles onto my tiny brain, I was content with my own stupidity. I hated crossword puzzles, because I decided if being able to complete one was a sign of intelligence, then, I was obviously an idiot.

Yet, I'll admit, every once in a while, in one of those rare "I feel intelligent moments," I'd pull out the daily puzzle and convince myself I too was capable of completing it. Confidently, I'd scan the clues, swiftly write in two or three answers and then stop, look, think. Think, look. Look, think. Think, look, pull hair out, curse, crumble, rip puzzle into itty bitty pieces and then to assure myself that I was plenty smart enough, I'd offer to help out my daughter with her kindergarten homework.

I could've lived my entire life in a haze of ignorant bliss, never knowing that an aril was a seed coating, or that there was such a place as the Inner Hebrides Island. But now that my sister comes over and fills in half puzzles and then heartlessly walks out, leaving the unfinished drug right on my table, I'm constantly confronted by my mental ineptitude.

I thought a suffering ennui was a sick bird, and after checking my dictionary, but after checking my dictionary, I discovered it means, boredom. Do you think that helped me fill in the puzzle? NO!! And you'd think the clue, "One of the Astaires" would leave four spaces for Fred, right? WRONG! And a "wide separation" is not only a gape, but also a gulf! And they both have four letters.

SLIGHTLY OFF

by Deb DiSandro

Things were unraveling at home. I hadn't cooked in weeks, the lid on the laundry basket had finally hit the ceiling and I was ignoring the kids - wait a minute, I do those things every week.

Then one day it happened. After hours of hair pulling, I realized that "twenty cents?" was not a pair of dimes, but a PARADIGMS! I did it! I had finished the entire puzzle. It was like reaching nirvana. I sang, I danced, I giggled like a school girl - a super smart school girl, of course.

Naturally, the healthy thing to do would be to stop and never work another puzzle again, right? Walk away while I still have a few marbles left. And that's exactly what I intend to do. Yup. Right after someone tells me what a caspian feeder is, I'm quitting, cold turkey. By the way, what's another name for cold turkey? Leftovers maybe?

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