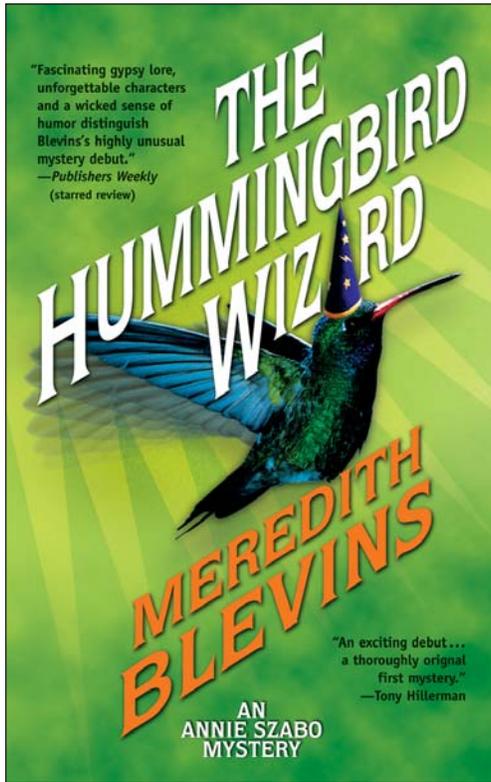




Meredith Blevins

The Hummingbird Wizard



400 pages • 0-765-34683-4

Library Journal chose *The Hummingbird Wizard* as one of the five best mysteries for the year 2003.

★“Fascinating Gypsy lore, unforgettable characters and a wicked sense of humor distinguish Blevins’s highly unusual mystery debut. This stellar first, with its assured prose, will delight any mystery fan.”

—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, STARRED REVIEW

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



PHOTO: SAM MEREDITH WELDON

Meredith Blevins lives in the Canyonlands with her husband, writer Win Blevins; together they have five children. Meredith is a practicing music therapist. She has been a member of the Gypsy Lore Society for twenty years, and continues to learn from their sense

of independence and humor. Living out her adventure through writing, playing music, and loving her family, she loves the sound of laughter and the pull of mystery.

ABOUT THE BOOK

“Jerry and I grew up before smog was invented. We both left Los Angeles when the hills disappeared and the ocean got tired of movie stars. Jerry had been an occasional boyfriend and my oldest pal...”

Driving full steam ahead with her life after the unexpected death of her husband, Annie Szabo was not planning on veering off course again. But her late husband’s family, an outrageous and proud clan of Gypsies, has other plans. When Annie’s oldest friend, Jerry, turns up dead, she is plunged back into the family she tried to leave behind.

Suspecting murder, Annie is forced to form an alliance with Madame Mina, her stubborn and powerful mother-in-law, the heart of the Szabo family. Determined to find Jerry’s killer, the two women unravel the pattern of a tapestry wild with lawyers, criminals, kink, magic, and more death. One thing is certain—to catch a killer with a hidden agenda, Annie and Mina must use all of their resources: ancient curses, a talent for petty theft, bizarre love magic, a Gypsy PI, an SFPD detective, and a ribald sense of humor.

Rising from the center of this mayhem is a strange Romany man, the Hummingbird Wizard. Appearing in Annie's life, and in Annie's bed, he could prove to be the only one to help her bring the scattered pieces of her life and community together. Or he could tear them apart forever in the wake of passion and horrible revenge.

In this sexy, witty, suspenseful, and wildly original novel, Meredith Blevins paints a portrait of a vibrant family led by two bold women who refuse to let anything get between them and the truth.

PRAISE FOR MEREDITH BLEVINS

"In *The Hummingbird Wizard*, Meredith Blevins covers new literary ground, introducing us to a fascinating, dark world, and pulling it off with flair and grace and humor." —JONATHAN KELLERMAN

"Damn fine book. A terrific read of a truly intriguing, finely-crafted mystery. With *The Hummingbird Wizard*, Meredith Blevins explores new territory in a new dimension other authors have feared to go." —CLIVE CUSSLER

"Meredith Blevins has a sorcerer's command of language, an ear for electric dialogue, and the economy of style that usually comes only after many years of honing in the marketplace." —LOREN D. ESTLEMAN

"Meredith Blevins has a great sense of humor and a fresh, new voice." —BARBARA D'AMATO

"There are trace elements of fantasy and magical realism here, a well-developed mystery.... It's a warm, witty novel of life, love, death and family that will stick with the reader long after the story ends."
—THE DENVER POST

★"Blevins flavors her lively prose with frequent humor and unexpected twists; readers will be drawn in by the riveting characters, great plot, and insights into Gypsy culture." —LIBRARY JOURNAL, STARRED REVIEW

★"If you don't fall in love with the Szabos, you don't have hormones." —KIRKUS REVIEWS, STARRED REVIEW

"Meredith Blevins has written a thoroughly original first mystery, very funny, with characters you'll never forget."
—TONY HILLERMAN

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Madame Mina relates a Gypsy creation story: "Back one hundred generations ago there was no people but Gypsies. Everything walked and talked. Flowers visited each other, so did rocks. As time passed they all lost their legs. Trouble didn't. It still walks anywhere it wants. So do Gypsies." One theme of creation stories is that each group believes they were the first people on earth. What are other similar themes of creation stories?

2. We have lost many of the ties that bind us as families and, in the larger picture, as a culture. How does this affect us, both in positive and negative ways?

3. One of the keys to solving the murder in *The Hummingbird Wizard* is the eyewitness account of a street person. (In San Francisco, the number of homeless people is currently one out of eighty-seven people.) How does seeing a street person make you feel? Do you avert your eyes, give them change, buy them a sandwich? Any ideas about how they got there, how to help them?

4. During a traditional Gypsy funeral, the deceased person's *varado*, or transportation, is burned with all of his/her belongings inside it. In this case, Jerry owned an \$80,000 Mercedes that was torched on a secluded beach north of San Francisco, thus welding him for all eternity to German auto parts. Has something unexpected, humorous, or horrific ever happened to you at a family reunion, wedding, funeral, or holiday gathering?

5. The deceased had kept a diary for most of his life. His ex-wife and his oldest friend Annie Szabo read his diaries, looking for clues about his life, trying to learn when it began falling apart. How would you feel about reading a dead person's diary? Do you feel you'd have the right to be angry if you discovered an unsavory secret? How would you handle that?

6. Madame Mina considers herself to be an aging love goddess with no expiration date in sight. Our protagonist, Annie Szabo, has kids who are grown and still attracts plenty of attention from the opposite sex. What makes us feel and look sexy? What are the good things about sexuality as we age?

7. Have you ever visited a fortune-teller, palm reader, astrologer or tarot reader? If so, how was the experience? If not, would you be frightened to see one, skeptical at the onset, or open-minded? When they present someone with information that is correct, how do you think that happens?

GYPSY LORE

A group of people, probably high-caste warriors, left India one thousand years ago. They journeyed through Egypt and into the Balkans. The Gypsies' roaming lifestyle, dancing bears, fortune telling, and unusual clothes did not sit well with the Europeans. Ethnic laws were passed against the Gypsies—and they were forced to stay on the move. As they traveled, they spread their beliefs. Some of these were:

To Bring a Child: The husband and wife take an egg and make a small hole in each end. They kiss. They hold the egg between them, each with a hole in their mouth. The husband blows the raw egg into the wife's mouth. She swallows. The empty shell is placed on a table; the husband and wife make love. Afterward, they take the eggshell outside and bury it deep in the earth.

Family Unity: Take a small clipping from every family member's hair. Place them all in a large leaf, roll it, and tie the roll with one of the mother's hairs. Bury this beneath an oak tree.

To Make Yourself an Object of Desire: Draw a circle on the ground on the east side of a tree. Stand in the center. Say, "*Opré the rooker, adré the vesh Sichiriklo ta chirikli; Télé the rook adré the vesh Si piramno ta piramni.*" (Over the tree and into the woods are male and female birds. Under the tree and into the woods are male and female sweethearts.) Stick an oak branch straight into the ground, in the middle of the circle, and walk away. Do not look back.

The Bath: To heal a rift or consummate a union, a bath may be taken. Into the hot water place jasmine blossoms, rose petals, and comfrey. Repeat three times the healing you desire. It will be yours, and so will a healing peace within your heart.