

## What's In A Name? - Alex, Year 9, QLD

It's common courtesy, to ask a person their name. It is the most basic thing you can know about someone beyond the way they look. Does it really mean anything though? After all it's merely a collection of sounds. How much significance can a name possibly hold?

It was Monday, and I promise that's relevant. The weekend had come and gone too fast. I lay in bed at ten to seven, dreading the day to come. I had gotten into my version of a fight with my best friend again a few days previously and I wasn't ready to face her yet. She's a smart person, in fact her name means wisdom, but she was often mad over very frivolous things.

"It's because she's hurting," I told myself for what felt like the thousandth time, but a sense of defeat seemed to grip my heart and twist into spirals of anxiety that wrapped themselves through my empty gut.

Eventually I forced myself out of bed, motivated not by some newfound determination to make the most of the day, but rather by a heavy sense of obligation. Going through my usual morning routine was comforting and temporarily quietened my racing thoughts.

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People often say I'm good with words, that I have a way of speaking and articulating myself in a way that makes them listen, that is succinct and even persuasive, that I'm in some way interesting. I've never understood this. I ramble a lot and trip over words, often I cannot speak at all. It's as if there is so much and at the same time so little going on in my head that words simply cannot come into fruition.

Given the mood I was in when I awoke, it's unsurprising that today was one of those days.

Ordinarily when my teachers stop talking it gives me a chance to. Not today. Sitting in history with a long and uninteresting sheet of WW2 questions perched in front of me, the name "Adolf Hitler" caught my eye.

*'I wonder if anyone would call their kid Adolf after what he did. Come to think of it, a lot of names have been claimed by people like him.'* It's an idea that's always intrigued me, the legacy that's left by people in history, the weight their names carry. Most people would never consider giving their child the same name as someone as infamous as Hitler, even though really, it's quite silly. You would be ridiculed for it, have your sanity questioned, be poked and prodded by everyone around you. "Who calls their kid Adolf?"

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I hung back after history, trying to avoid the two girls who sit with me in our next class. They always wait diligently by the door for me, like a couple of loyal, albeit irksome golden

retrievers. All I wanted was three minutes of peace before being bombarded with the usual “What’s wrong with you?” questions.

I thought, foolishly, that maybe if I stayed back long enough, they would presume me absent and leave without me. However, unfortunately, they continued to wait.

Just as I decided I’d stayed in my classroom as long as was reasonable, my teacher called out my name. My birth name. I hate that name. Every time I’m addressed by it, it’s as though a mask has been forced over my whole body. I seem to shrivel up into a tiny, pathetic being inside the skull of what people see as me. On days where my thoughts and mouth have cut connections, I already feel like my body is not my own.

*She* piloted the vessel that contained me and turned to face my teacher. “Are you ok?” I nodded. “You’re not talking?” A shrug. “Do you want to see the councillor?” I shook my head.

Like usual in these situations, I was almost completely dissociated from everything, fearing that if I was any more present I may try to peel the skin right off my flesh. It’s beyond humiliating to be silent in this way, to have people asking a million questions, to be treated like some broken thing, like a spectacle to be gawked at.

As soon as the interrogation was over, I beelined for the door, avoiding eye contact with the girls outside, and sped away. Their “Hey wait up!” filled me with unexpected amounts of guilt.

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Abby (“source of joy”), and Mia (“bitterness, and beloved”), ignored me as we filed into our P.E classroom. This suited me just fine.

H.P.E as I’m sure everyone knows, is an acronym for Health and Physical Education. Ironically, even when we’re engaged in the health portion of this subject, it’s still commonly referred to as just “P.E,” leading the name to be deceptive.

Sometimes people’s names are like that, and sometimes they make perfect sense. Abby, with her small build and exhaustingly optimistic attitude, is to most, a source of joy. In this impending conversation, I would not think of her as such.

“Oi what’s up with you?” I looked back at her and shrugged. “Hello?” She infuriatingly waved a hand in front of my face. “Talk. To. Me.” She enunciated every word, as though I was some small child incapable of understanding English.

As I pulled my laptop out of my bag she snapped, “Dude what the hell is wrong with you, you’re being so rude.”

I typed “*idk*” into my search bar, and she scowled ferociously.

Maybe I was being rude. The relentless questions continued for the next seventy minutes, as I shrunk ever further into my seat. She seemed entirely unaware of the fact that I was basically about to cry.

“Bye then.” Abby rolled her eyes at me as I stood and left the room after class. I was in two minds about what to do now, I half feared and half yearned for the sight of my friends’ faces. Almost instinctually however I found myself walking towards them at an unnaturally brisk pace.

As is typical for a Monday I was the first one there. Simultaneously relieved and worried, I sat down with my bag in my lap and rested my chin on it, waiting. “Wisdom” was the next one there, which was again typical.

“Waddup,” she asked, as in one fluid motion she slung her bag off her back, plonked it on our bench, and turned to face me. I blinked up at her and shrugged.

Our other friend, Claudia (“lame” – which is almost fitting since she walks kind of like a duck) arrived after a few painful minutes of one-sided conversation. I almost thanked some god I don’t believe in that neither of them questioned my silence. More than anything I was glad that no one appeared mad anymore.

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The unfortunate souls in my school are often subjected to study lectures in our auditorium. I say unfortunate, but I was rather chuffed with getting to miss English for one of them today. To my great surprise, it started almost immediately. A skinny guy in jeans, who certainly appeared to be the kind of person to give a study lecture, stood at the front of the room.

“Hi guys!” He called out cheerily, bouncing on the balls of his feet. No one said anything. “Right, I forgot to introduce myself. I’m Ethan, Eth-man, or Etho, whatever you prefer!”

*‘That’s a lot of names,’* I thought in slight alarm.

The lecture turned out to be about scheduling. Despite this, it was reasonably engaging, he would let people participate and ask them questions, the first of which was always their name.

“You! What’s your name?” He pointed to a guy at the back of the room.

“Lebron.”

Ethan looked weirdly thrilled. Addressing the room at large he asked, "Is that really his name?" Everyone nodded and Ethan's grin grew. "You a basketball fan?" he questioned. See what I mean about famous people's names?

I made the mistake of raising my hand. I knew as soon as I did that I messed up, even more so because I was the only one.

He called on me. He asked my name. My world fell inwards.

Perhaps if it was a different question I could have choked out a reply, but it was as though I suddenly felt everything at once. The heat in my face, the uncomfortable chair, the slight weight on my chest, the anxiety crawling up my throat, the eyes of every person in that room.

He asked again. I stopped breathing. He was looking at me strangely now, and so were many other people. In the moment no worded thoughts could penetrate the pure terror that was coursing through me. I felt so very stupid.

Eventually he gave up, but something inside me had already died a little. After the lecture, he asked the girl sitting next to me. I have no idea why he needed to know so badly.

"Amelia," she replied. And the mask seemed to crush me completely. I almost burst out in tears right there.

That is not my name.