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What's In A Deadname?

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What's In A Deadname?

Author Bio

Theodore Szpakowski is a history major with minors in public history and writing. He enjoys writing, playing Dungeons and Dragons, and spending time in the library--basically anything with an element of storytelling.

What's In A Deadname?

THEODORE J. SZPAKOWSKI

At the end of the day, I just wanted
The name on my gravestone
Not to kill me a second time.

I didn't want to make my mom cry in the car
On our way to the courthouse, because
She wanted me to want her
More involved in the process.

I let her pick my middle name
Because we learned in AP Psychology
That people are more likely to accept changes
That they have a voice in.
I tried to make it as easy for her as I could.

I corrected and moved on:
"Theodore." "He." "Son."
I made jokes about it:
"Who's Jane? There's no Jane here."
And my mom said I was shoving it down their throats.
So I shut my God-damned mouth
and she wanted me to check in more frequently.
(I should admit, "Jane"
Isn't the name I was born with.
But I wouldn't let this poem exhume
A name resting undisturbed
Until her next weekly phone call.)

She calls me, but I'm not who
She really wants to talk to.
She's said she's "still grieving Jane,"
But there's no rock she can go to

With “Jane” carved into it.
You can’t die if you never lived in the first place.

A deadname isn’t the name a dead person has.
The name itself is dead. It’s gone—
But perhaps mine is more ghost or zombie than corpse.
It’s haunting me, chasing me
Showing up on my paperwork,
On my mother’s mouth.

She cried in the parking lot
While I waited in line with my forms
And she didn’t tell me she was upset
Until the drive home, when it was too late
For me to do anything about it.

She said she was grieving Jane.
She said she knew that using the correct name
Is suicide prevention for trans youth,
But that it didn’t feel like a reassurance.
The statistics were a threat to her.

I don’t want to die for a good while yet.
At least, I’d like to hear the name I chose
More times than the name she chose for me
Before I’m buried under either one.

It’s just that dying once is enough for me.
When it feels like being choked
Every time she gets it wrong,
I don’t want to be dying forever.