

NOMEN EST OMEN

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The last time Dr. Wombat invited me over for strawberries and cream I finally got into a discussion about his title with him. The furry phascolome possesses several doctorates, which he declines to discuss in any detail, but he did enlighten me about his iatriatrical specialty, which he considered his most trivial, but at the same time most lucrative.

"Iatriatrist?" I said with a rising intonation.

"Physician to physicians," he clarified. "I specialize not in drug-ging, cutting, or other physical manipulations, which, of course, medicos themselves are proficient in, but in the area where their expertise is most lacking, common sense. I insist on immediate payment in cash, although I have at times taken payment in kind such as condominiums in the Antilles, a red Mercedes equipped with X-ray and bidet, and gold-plated golf clubs. I know of your fascination with onomatology, so I will relate, under seal of the most profound secrecy, a successful case involving feminism and the matrimonial surname.

"Dr. Ursula C. was a young Beverly Hills specialist in liposuction in practice with another young doctress. Between them they did an enormous business, Ursula specializing in the right buttock and thigh and her partner in the left, services billed separately, on advice of their accountants, to maximize profits.

"Well, as they say, birds of a feather flock together, and Doc Ursula went to a hot-air balloon meet in Albuquerque. There she saw a balloon in the form of an immense pink breast. Engaging the proud pilot in conversation she learned that the letters MAD stenciled on the aerostat stood for Mammary Augmentation, Dexter, the pilot's specialty (for he, too, held a doctorate in leechcraft). There proved to be a reciprocal attraction between the two, and, before you could say 'subacute orchiditis' they had administered each other a battery of venereal disease tests (happily all negative) and taken up housekeeping together in Grand Teton, Dr. Brian U.'s villa in Bel Air. One thing led to another, and finally they decided to wed.

"That was what precipitated Ursula C.'s visit to me--a visit, alas, unlike her former ones when she would show up with quips, stories, and conundrums like 'How is a chrysalis like hot rolls?' or 'Say, did I ever tell you about Lopsided Suzy who ran out of money after I performed my specialty on her and she was too broke

to afford my partner's?' She confided her problem to me. Midst tears she told how she wished to wed Brian U. and, as a feminist, prefix her own surname to his for a married name."

"Hardly a problem," I sniffed.

"It is if your surname is Cox and your fiancé's is Ucker," replied the Wombat.

"And your resolution was?"

"Free association. Take the impossible compound name--what other names does it bring to mind? Why, Ganymede, Richard Plantagenet the First, Oscar Wilde. I said to Ursula, 'You are wild about Brian and he about you. My advice is to make the best of a bad name and convert it to Wilde. This will describe your feelings about each other and at the same time create a numerical aura to bless your union. By numerical order in the alphabet W-I-L-D-E gives 23-9-12-4-5, which adds up to 53, a prime number, symbolizing an inseverable enosis.'

"'But my lucky number is seven,' objected Dr. Cox. 'Nothing easier,' I replied, 'just remove the D and you have 49, which is 7 times 7 and divisible by nothing but your lucky number and unity. Simultaneously the name WILE describes a very valuable product of the mind, especially important to physicians, while at the same time it is the Germanic member of the doublet WILE-GUILE, the latter being the Romance member.'

"Ursula was wild about WILE. Both she and Brian adopted my counsel, and I pocketed the pleasant fee of \$5000."

"Rather exorbitant, wasn't it?" expostulated I.

"Are you kidding?" snapped The Wombat. "Why, Ursula can get more than that for liposucking just one Beverly Hills buttock and double it by doing the thigh."

"How is a chrysalis like a hot roll?" I asked in a mollifying tone.

The Wombat waved his dexter mit. "Later. What do you think of the statement (true, may I add) that 'Florence Flup's flivver flipped fatally in Fluvanna Friday'?"

Highly improbable, but, if you say it's true, not impossible. Tripartite subject, verb, and modal adverb, local adverb, as well as temporal adverb all beginning with the low-ranking English surd labiodental fricative f--extremely improbable. I would have to consult with a statistician like A. Ross Eckler to learn just how improbable."

"It was fate, my dear boy," replied the hassocklike logothere. "Flip, FLap, FLOp, FLUP! Sheer elemental attraction, the cradle of FL and P calling for the final vowel! In a FLivver. In FLuvanna County. Consequence: Fatal. Date: Friday of Christmas week 1987. What is more: First name--Florence. The sheer tragic beauty of it!"

He sighed, then continued. "Ms. Flup was seventy-five. I have often wondered how and why she survived her fifty-fifth year; for there are four fatal f's therein. Perhaps she did not then drive or live in Fluvanna County, Virginia. I have only the few facts of her funerary notice. This demands the logological expertise of a Dmitri A. Borgmann." He sighed again and sniffled.

Seeking to cheer him up I said, "What's that story about Lopsided Suzy?"

He waved his sinister mit. "Later. Ergo, nomen est omen! You like problems. Here I have a list of names for you. Look them over and see if you can describe and divine the bearers of them. I will say that it is a single large American group, much in the news and immediately recognizable to the eye."

Hereupon he rummaged furiously in the welter of books and papers on his desk, finally opening a leather-bound tome and retrieving a scribbled list. I noted that the volume was the 1734 edition of Pöllnitz's La Saxe galante. The Wombat's taste in reading is very catholic.

Handing me the list The Wombat remarked that he could make additions to it every day if he chose, but that the items it contained were typical and enough to enable any anywheres near observant wordster to pick out such names on sight. I looked at the following.

A'lelia	KaVonya	Latasha	Shereka
Athelia	Keesha	Latrice	Signithia
Charmarlina	Keisha	LaVell	Sohelia
Chavone	Kenisha	Leisha	Tanessa
Checharna	Kesha	Lonise	Tanisha
Denetra	Kia	Orice	Tanyia
Deotha	LaChelle	Peola	Tia
Dwayne	LaKeesha	Randique	Twanda
Dyanna	LaKeisha	Sharvon	Verbantine
Ebora	Lakisha	Shavonta	Vividell
Ja'Net	Laouida		

While I was studying these names The Wombat abstracted the doily from under his cup of tea and copied off it onto the back of an envelope these additional names:

Annyoz	Gonzella	Schonte	Shermona
Bayonia	Keviann	Shawreika	Shevon
Canveta	Mizahn	Shanell	Toukie
Delabiane	Nathash		

"First of all," I said after thoroughly examining the two lists, "there are bizarre spellings of girl's names, like DYANNA for DIANA, JA'NET for JANET, and TANYIA for TANYA, perhaps."

"Right," replied my friend, making a note thereof.

"Then, there seems to be a liking for exotic syllables, DWAN-TWAN-, also SHA-, KA-, and VON- syllables. Lots of K's and V's.

A quite apparent desire for the exotic."

"Bizarre, exotic," murmured The Wombat as he made notes.

"Initial LA's; apparently diminutive finals: -INA, -ELLA, -INE, and so on."

"Diminutives," repeated my friend.

"Many of the names sound foreign or seem designed so to sound. The whole cast of the names is not baroque, rococo, but romantic, perhaps pseudo-romantic."

The Wombat noted vigorously.

"Contrived final stress accents. At least one word, ATHELIA, is the name of a disease, nipplelessness, or, rather, more of an affliction than a disease."

"You have noted bizarre, exotic, contrived, foreign, romantic, and inappropriate in the case of ATHELIA. What does that lead you to?"

"These names express a desire for distinction and cry out 'I am somebody special.' They do not fit in with even ordinarily exotic girl's names, such as THETIS ANDELIA BAREFOOT, where THETIS is a name from Greek mythology and ANDELIA, as the middle name, probably is traditional in the family, while BAREFOOT is merely one of those rather strange Southern family names like LIP-TRAP. These must be Southern girl's names or, at least, the names of girls with roots in the South. I get the feeling of a desire to escape repression and an echo of the Southern black practice of 'sounding,' that is, trying to top someone's utterance; here trying to top usual names. I would say that these are black girls' and womens' names."

"Right you are," replied The Wombat. "These names indicate both rebellion and innovation. I believe that the safer and more comfortable blacks feel in the white culture, the fewer such names you will see."

"Now can you tell me the resemblance between a chrysalis and hot rolls?"

"A chrysalis: the grub that makes the butterfly; hot rolls: the grub that makes the butter fly."

"And Lopsided Suzy's story?" I persisted.

"That is too risqué for a youngster like you," replied The Wombat.