

## Animals without names

alpha (she/no pronoun)

I met Victor during a workshop on a very warm Sunday. I loved their skirt and it made me think that we could become friends or lovers, or we could start a leisure activity together, like sailing or bird watching. Some people might call it naivety to have these thoughts about a masculine-presenting person just because they are wearing a skirt. I call it intuition.

We became friends. I stalked them online and saw this sentence written under their Instagram name: *animals with no names sleep without worries*. This touched me deeply. If I were a cartoon, the little light bulb above my head would have turned on.

Which animals have names and which do not? What does it mean when an animal has a name? Are animals with names the ones that live with people? Are they the tamed ones? Do wild animals have names? If yes, what are they called? And who is giving them the names? Is giving names a human concept? How can I find out if I don't speak any animal language? What does it mean to give a name to someone? How does this action affect the identity of other beings?

I sensed this was an interesting field for me. Giving someone a name is a powerful action. It is a decision which affects a person directly and in quite a strong way. It is a definition, a creation, an expectation. Our name is the word we identify with the most; it is the word people associate us with. A name is a label, an order. It is someone's dream we have to fulfil. A name belongs to us and we belong to it. It is a life partner we commit to – if we choose to. It is a piece of luggage that we carry with us all the time. At the same time, it is a word with a very specific content. A word which is open to interpretations and associations of all kinds. If we are not already this word, we might become this word at some point. It is a force that shapes us: our personality, our identity, our habits, even our looks.

“Parents can give their child a name or a scientist can give an element a name,” I read on the Wikipedia entry for name. This makes me feel that children, in a way, are experiments. Children have no influence on the decision of their name at the time it happens, at least not in western culture.

They are not able to give their consent to a decision that accompanies them for a lifetime.

Back to the animals. Animals with no names sleep without worries. Does this mean that creatures with names immediately have worries? Does a name imply that there is something to worry about? Does name equal trouble? What does a name in this context stand for? Identity? Opinion? Being seen? Having a task to accomplish?

When I met Victor again, I asked them why this sentence is the only thing that they write about themselves on Instagram. They explained this is the title of a painting by their father. The original title of the painting is *Les animaux sans noms dorment sans inquiétudes* by the painter Philippe Labarthe. You can see the painting on the back of this book.

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