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The Tracker William Eagle Feather Muses on His Name

by Robert Cooperman

Spawned by a white trapper
sheltered for a night by a Ute woman
stolen by raiding Lakotas
and treated no better than a slave,
I was the boy mud was flung at
after Mother died,
coughing red blizzards.

My name: "William"
came to me after John Sprockett
recited a poem by that Shakespeare,
at a funeral, something about not
fearing the sun no more.
I couldn't cipher half the words,
but the sounds wove pictures pretty
as geese across the falling-leaf sky.

I figured William Shakespeare
had powerful magic, so took his name:

"Eagle Feather."
Mother said one fluttered down
at my birth: only reason
the tribe didn't set me out to die.

The one time I glimpsed
Preacher's wife, I wanted
to whisper my name in her ear
over and over and over.

