

On the Importance of Spelling

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“Oooooohhhhhh.”

The euphoric sound resonated in the stallion’s deep timbre, before descending into a slow, soft whooshing as the last of the air in his lungs escaped through pursed lips. In the romantic glow of candlelight, a pink-coated alicorn gazed at her husband’s display of otherworldly bliss, seemingly quite satisfied with herself for having finally talked him into it. “So, was I right?” she questioned with a saucy grin.

“You have *no idea* how good this feels...” Shining Armor replied, laying his head back lazily and inhaling a generous amount of the intoxicating smells that hung in the hot, moist air around the two ponies.

His wife chuckled. “I think I have *some* idea.”

“Oh, yeah.” The unicorn’s eyes opened halfway, a semblance of coherent awareness slowly returning to him. “Right.” He joined his mate in her soft laughter.

“Well, it must certainly feel good if you’ve stopped caring about making sense. I told you this isn’t something just mares enjoy, and if you opened your mind up a little —”

“I know,” he interrupted, lifting a hoof up, “you were right, as always. I should’ve listened to you from the start.” He finally focussed his gaze, placing it squarely on the pink pony. “This is wonderful, Cadence. I love you.” He exhaled again, his face flushed nearly to the point of glowing.

His wife returned his loving look. “I figured you could use a reward after all you did for me. I’m happy you’re enjoying yourself.”

“Mhhmmmm...” Shining Armor stared through closed eyelids into some imaginary world. “It reminds me of when I was little and my mom used to do this for me.”

“Your mom?”

“Yeah. Mom and I did this all the time.” He opened his eyes again, a nostalgic smile on his lips. “And there were the times Twiley joined us. She was so little then. She’d thrash around and scream like a banshee. She just loved it. Of course, I’d be the one helping mom clean up at the end when it was Twilight who couldn’t control herself.”

The alicorn’s grin grew in proportion to his.

“But I could never stay mad at her. You have no idea how cute Twiley looks when she gets totally wet like that.”

His lover snickered. “Well, when we have kids, I’ll make sure we all do it together. It may just seem like fun but this kind of thing really does help strengthen emotional bonds.” She swiftly brought her muzzle to his and kissed him. “Which is why I’m so glad we’re doing it together now.”

He nodded in agreement. “We definitely need to do this more often. It just feels *so good*.” The last two words came out in a blissful moan. “It’s almost better than sex.”

The alicorn’s eyelids lowered, a smidgen of offense playing on her features. “It’s just a bubble bath, hun,” she stated flatly.

Shining lifted a hoof out of the water to point at his wife. “Aromatic hydrotherapy,” he corrected smugly, throwing her earlier words back at her.

She huffed, though she couldn’t keep a corner of her mouth from curling up.

Slyly, slowly, he moved towards her and planted a long, sensual kiss on her lips, easily outdoing her earlier peck. “But don’t worry. In a contest between you and an emperor-sized bathtub, I’ll take you any day of the week.” The stallion looked up thoughtfully. “Though, on second thought, it could be a pretty tough call to make.”

He laughed as a pair of pink forehooves angrily slammed him back against his side of the tub. He flinched only slightly when a splash of water hit him the face—dousing several nearby candles in the process—and his grin did not abate in the slightest as he spat out the liquid that had landed in his mouth. It certainly seemed that it would be able to withstand any punishment his wife could put him through.

The alicorn’s smile, however, indicated that she had already exhausted her supply of fake anger. For a while, the two ponies sat there; their lower bodies soaking in the warm bath, the rest of them wrapped in the fragrant vapours it was giving off. The only sound was the soft popping of soap bubbles on the surface of the water, and the occasional sloshing of the liquid as one of them adjusted position slightly.

“Today was wonderful, Shine,” the mare finally said. She was no longer smiling—a smile could never do justice to the strength of the connection the two ponies were reveling in. Only her eyes were expressive enough to even dare try. “Thank you.”

“It’s your birthday. I had to make it special. I just wish I could make every day this wonderful for you.”

Her eyes spoke the words even before her lips could. “You do.”

Silence reigned once more. Though the stallion’s face was already flushed from the temperature of his surroundings, the pink on his cheeks turned a shade more intense. He pulled his forelimbs out of the water and rested them on the edge of the tub, leaning back and looking into the ceiling.

“So,” he began after a few minutes had passed, “what was wrong with the flowers?”

Surprise painted the pink mare’s features. “What are you talking about?”

“The roses I gave you. You didn’t like them.”

“I love them. They’re beautiful,” she insisted, pointing a hoof in the general direction of the living room, where the blossoms in question were presently occupying the role of a table centerpiece.

Shining frowned. “Cady, don’t lie to me. I could tell you didn’t like them when you saw them the first time. I didn’t want to bring it up with everypony else there, and I think you fooled them all, but... I could tell.”

“I’m not lying,” the alicorn protested. One her eyebrows arched up. “And how could you tell that, anyway?”

“Your smile,” he explained. “It was perfectly even. *Symmetrical.*”

The princess blinked. “And...?”

“When you’re *really* happy—when you smile *for real*—the right side of your mouth pulls back just a tiny bit more than the left. You didn’t do that. Your smile was fake.”

The pink mare stared at her husband in shock. “Shine, that’s... that’s... just, *wow*. I really do that?!”

He nodded sagely. “So, are you finally going to tell me what’s wrong with the flowers?”

“The flowers are perfect!”

The stallion shot her a glare that was equal parts annoyance and accusation.

She avoided his gaze as she sighed resignedly. “It was the note,” at last she admitted, her volume barely above a whisper.

“The note?” Shining Armor screwed up his face in confusion. “The note with the roses?”

His wife gently bobbed her head in affirmation. “What you wrote in it. It’s really not a big deal. Please don’t worry about it.”

His eyes searched upward as he recalled the simple message hoofwritten onto the perfectly ordinary white card he had attached to the bouquet: “*I adore you, Cadence*’. I suppose I could have written more, but I’m not a poet. And I figured you’d already be getting ‘Happy Birthdays’ from everypony else. I just wanted something simple to tell you how I felt.” He hung his head in shame. “I’m sorry. I thought it would be enough...”

“It was!” she assured him.

“Then what? It is the word ‘adore’? I thought of just putting down ‘I love you’ but that seemed so cliché.”

“It’s not that.” She took a deep breath. “It’s the way you wrote my name.” Seeing his confused expression, she clarified, “The way you spelled it.”

“Cee, ay, dee, ee, en, cee, ee?”

She nodded.

“That’s *wrong?!?*”

“It’s not wrong—not exactly. There’s no ‘official’ spelling for it, there’s just what I prefer ponies use. And... that’s not the spelling I prefer. Don’t worry; plenty of ponies have done exactly what you did, and I don’t hold it against them. It’s a perfectly reasonable assumption—‘cadence’ is a real musical term, and my full name includes the word ‘Cadenza’, so...”

Shining Armor’s face was threatening to be rent apart by the eyebrows stretching it upward and the lower jaw pulling it down. “Are you telling me that we’ve been married for over a *year* and I’ve been spelling your name wrong all this time?!”

“How many times did you actually write my name down?”

The unicorn opened his mouth to answer, but after a few seconds without producing a sound, he closed it again. For a while, he splashed idly at the water in front of him, and then finally put forth a guilt-tainted response. "I'm not actually sure."

His wife nodded. "I don't think I ever saw you write it before. Whenever you wrote a letter or a note to me, you always called me 'darling' or 'dear' or 'love'... or 'Cady'."

Shining Armor's initial shock had mellowed to a relaxed sort of disbelief. "I guess I just had this assumption in my mind..." He sighed loudly. "All this time, I didn't even have your name right?"

"You've been *saying* it right," the pink mare offered with a comforting smile. "And it's not as if you're mistaking me for some other pony... or *changeling*," she teased—the reminder forcing a tiny wince from the stallion. "I know you love me, Shine, no matter how you spell my name." She began to chuckle gently. "It's actually pretty funny if you think about it."

Her husband wasn't laughing. "But it's your *name*. It's your *identity*; who you are."

"It is not!" she countered. "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet. Would you stop loving me if I changed my name to... Twilight... Velvet?"

"*What?!*"

"It's just an example!" The mare turned away, now furiously blushing herself. "I'm not good at thinking up names on the spot," she mumbled, looking at the surface of the water as if the option of drowning herself had suddenly become very desirable.

At last, Shining Armor let out a small chuckle. "I'll say! But for the record, yes, I'd still love you, even if you changed your name to my mom's." He snorted. "That would be pretty creepy, though. Please don't do that."

"I won't." She turned back to face him. "The point is, it's not that big of a deal."

The stallion thoughtfully placed a hoof to his chin. "I suppose that you've got a point. You're my beautiful, lovely wife, no matter whether I can write it down or not." He moved back to within kissing distance. "Would you still love me, even if I were a complete illiterate and couldn't write *anything*?"

She grinned. "Trust me. You have plenty of talents that are worth a lot more to me than your ability to write."

“Oh?” He pressed his lips to her neck, moving his muzzle through wet, pink fur to caress the skin underneath. The alicorn tossed her head back, allowing him greater access; urging him to go on. For a few, tantalizing seconds, he did. She threw him a look of mild disappointment when he pulled away and nonchalantly resumed their discussion. “I’d still like to know what your real name is, though.”

His mate shook her head. “My ‘real name’ is Mi Amore Cadenza, and I *know* you’ve been spelling *that* right. Legally, that’s the only name I have. Anything else is just a short form; a *nickname*. Like the way you sometimes call me ‘Cady’. How do you spell *that*, anyway?”

“Cee, ay, dee, wye.”

“Why not with an ‘eye’ and an ‘ee’?”

“Because... I dunno.” The unicorn shrugged. “That’s just the way I picture it in my mind, like I picture ‘Cadence’.”

“But I never call myself ‘Cady’, so do I even have a say in how you should spell it?”

He scratched his head. “I don’t know. I mean, I guess I came up with it, but I’ll spell it however you want if you have a preference. But ‘Cadence’ is different; it’s what you’ve been calling yourself for years. That’s what you’ve been for as long as we’ve known each other. Twiley didn’t even know that it *wasn’t* your full name. It’s obviously important to you, and I want to get it right.” He lifted a hoof before she could speak. “And by ‘right’, I mean the way that’s right *to you*.”

The princess beamed appreciatively—her grin extending almost-imperceptibly further along the right side of her face. “Alright. Do you want to hear the full story, then?”

With one eyebrow arching in intrigue, her husband nodded.

“When my parents found me and adopted me—back when I was still just a pegasus foal—they wanted to name me after their great-great-aunt, Cadince. That’s cee, ay, dee, *eye*, en, cee, ee.”

“Really? *That’s* how you spell it?”

“I’m not finished.” She pointed a hoof upward in the way that academics were fond of doing when delivering a lecture. “Cadince had been a Canterlot pony, but we were living in Maremmano, so they decided to give me a more ‘normal’ local name.”

“Mi Amore Cadenza.”

“Right. They thought that my aunt’s name could still be my nickname, and that’s the way things went for a while. I was Cadenza publically, but Cadince to my parents. Then... everything changed when I learned to write.” She smirked.

The stallion was now listening with rapt attention.

“I insisted on spelling it cee, ay, dee, *ay*, en, cee, ee. I think I just liked words that ended the same way. ‘Acquaintance’, ‘concordance’, ‘remittance’, ‘abidance’...”

“Whoa.” Shining Armor gave a skeptical sideways glance. “Those are some pretty big words for a little filly. How old were you?”

The mare giggled in response. “I used to read so much back then, your sister would be proud. I loved learning new words. I thought some were prettier than others, and I thought my name looked better that way. My parents didn’t like it one bit, but I told them that it was *my* name and I would spell it however I wanted to.”

“Isn’t that what I’ve been saying all this time?” the stallion asked with a shade of frustration.

“Yes,” she admitted, “but I’m not nearly as stubborn now as I was back then. I was ready to fight my parents tooth and hoof about it. They tried to make me feel guilty by saying my aunt would be so very sad if she saw that I didn’t like her name. That *almost* worked. But then I got a brilliant idea.”

By this point, the young princess was grinning fiendishly, and her eyes were sparkling. “I asked my parents how they could be sure that my aunt spelled her name the way *they* did, and not the way that *I* did. I told them I wouldn’t accept anything other than an official document stating her name.”

Shining Armor cocked his head to the side. “I’m having real trouble picturing you fighting with your own parents about legal documentation involving a relative’s name.”

A soft laugh tumbled from her mouth. “I was pretty spoiled as a child. I acted like... well, a *princess*. Rather ironic, since it was before I actually became one. Everything had to be perfect, and it had to be *my* way, always. Luckily, I grew out of it.” Her devilish smirk gained in force. “Mostly.”

The stallion smiled knowingly in response. “So... what finally happened with your aunt?”

“As it turned out, getting official documentation was a lot harder than it seemed. In the end, my parents had to send a formal request to get a copy of my aunt’s birth certificate from the archives in Canterlot. Imagine their surprise when the certificate came back—and it said ‘*Candice!*’”

The stallion’s jaw dropped again. “You’re joking?”

“No, that’s really what happened. It took us a while to figure out that the birth certificate we got was for a *completely different great-great-aunt*; one that neither I nor my parents ever even knew about. We did some research and she was apparently a very nice pony. Loved kids. Called herself ‘Candie’—that’s with an eye, ee.”

By this point, Shining was slowly rubbing a hoof against one of his temples. “This is getting confusing.”

“Just you wait.” The alicorn’s wings had extended, and her excitement was visible as she neared the climax of her tale. “So, after we finally figured out which aunt we wanted, we sent another request to Canterlot. It took a *month* to get a response back, and in the meantime my parents and I were *still* fighting about my name.”

“It seems the stubbornness runs in the family, then,” the white unicorn quipped.

His lover let loose another laugh and nodded earnestly in agreement. “Eventually they got me to promise that I would use either my full name, or whatever name was on my aunt’s birth certificate, and nothing else. I gave my word as a princess, so I had to follow through.”

“So, you still go by your aunt’s name?”

“I do.”

“Which is...?”

The pink mare inhaled and licked her lips, as if she could already taste the deliciousness of what she was about to utter.

“Kay, aitch, ee, wye, dee, eye, en, ess, ess.”

Shining Armor just stared, displaying significantly less conscious thought than a changeling-victim in the final stages of mind control.

His simpering wife stared right back, awaiting a response.

The bubbles on the water continued to pop inconsiderately.

His lips connected and parted several times before a sound finally emerged. “Kay...?”

“...aitch, ee, wye, dee, eye, en, ess, ess,” the princess pony affirmed calmly. “Kheydins.”

The unicorn took a moment to carefully examine his own reflection in his mate’s eyes, wordlessly seeking assistance from the doppelganger. It took only a few seconds for the two stallions came to an agreement.

“Alright, now you’re just fucking with me.”

The mare moved sensually closer. With an expression of pure, honest desire, she hooked a foreleg around his neck, bringing the pair of muzzles dangerously close to collision.

“Oh, Shining Armor,” she said softly, running her other forehoof along his cheek, “of course I am.”

Their mouths connected, the coupling made slightly complicated by the idiotic, toothy grins both ponies now had in their possession and the immature chortles they were struggling to contain.

“Mhhmmmm.”

“Mmmm.”

They broke apart, and only then did the mare realise the grave tactical error she had made. Her kisses often had a disarming effect, but like the brilliant military leader he was, Shining Armor had learned her strategies and adapted. The poor princess’ eyes went wide just in time to see the magic aura vanish from the stallion’s horn. The spherical glob of water he had been levitating over her came crashing down in a torrent of soapy comeuppance, accented by a very satisfying shriek.

Once half the contents of the tub had ended up on the floor in the ensuing water fight, the two lovers’ lips, now much calmer, negotiated a peace treaty by the soft glow of their horns—the surrounding candles having been thoroughly doused by their liquid warfare.

“So, how much of that story was real?” the stallion queried of his once-again ally.

“All of it,” she stated with conviction, “except for that last part.” She giggled. “My aunt really was just Cadance—with an ‘ay’. I had had it right the whole time. My parents were... not happy, but they had to live up to their end of the bargain.”

“I’ll remember that.” He nodded. “And I’m sorry I got it wrong.”

“I already told you: Lots of ponies make the same mistake you did. You probably saw somepony else write my name that way and copied it without thinking—and since I never told you, you had no way of knowing. I don’t blame you.” She assessed the state of their bathroom with a frown. “But I *do* blame you for *this*.” She pointed an accusing hoof at the small flood they had created. “Got any brilliant strategies now?”

Shining Armor grinned proudly. “Remember what I said about Twiley making a mess when she was little? Well, I had to learn a few tricks to help mom out.”

His horn’s aura burst into preternatural brilliance as he commanded the spilled water to coalesce into a single, floating sphere, which he then hovered toyingly over Cadance’s head. She gave him an unamused look.

“Please get the towels while I hold this,” he explained with a slight roll of the eyes, “if you can dry us both off, we can get out and then I’ll drop the water back in.”

She did so, retrieving a number of towels and quickly wiping herself dry with one while wrapping a second around her mane as she stepped out of the tub. This was followed by a vigorous scrubbing of her husband’s gleaming white coat and blue locks. The mare couldn’t hide a degree of admiration as she appraised the levitating mass being lowered into the tub.

“That’s pretty hard to do even for the most skilled unicorns,” she complimented. “You keep surprising me.” She playfully bumped a wing to his flank. “Keep it up.”

While the pink pony made her way straight to bed, her husband, eyes aglint with an *idea*, made a surreptitious detour into his office before joining her.

“What’s that?” she inquired when Shining entered their bedroom with a manila envelope in his telekinetic grasp.

“Well, with all this talk about names and proper spelling, I thought it would be a good time to show you *this*.” He pulled a sheet of aged parchment from the envelope and held it close to his chest as he climbed into bed. “But first... how many letters are there in my name?”

“Twelve,” she answered without hesitation. “Seven plus five.”

“What if I told you,” he questioned with a smirk, “that you were off by one?” He proffered the document for inspection. “*My birth certificate.*”

As she took hold of it, the winged mare’s focus immediately fell onto the two most important words inked on the record:

Shining Armour

For the first time that night, it was she who had trouble forming words. She shook her head in disbelief. “But... I saw you write it without the ‘yu’. In fact, I’m pretty sure that’s what we have on our *marriage* certificate!”

He shrugged. “I started dropping the ‘yu’ before I was even a teenager. Everypony kept getting it wrong and it was just easier to go with it. By the time I became a cadet in the Guard, *this* was the only document that still had the original spelling. I never had any problems because of it.” He placed the parchment back in its envelope, and set it aside on the nightstand. “So when you say that *you* are *you* no matter how anypony writes your name... I completely understand.”

He nuzzled her cheek lovingly. She smiled back at him, gently running a hoof through his still-damp mane.

“But... I’d be a pretty lousy husband if I didn’t take your feelings into account, so I hope that this—” He pulled a small, rectangular white card from seemingly nowhere. “—makes up for my mistake earlier today.”

The smile on the alicorn’s lips died a sudden and painful death as she read the card. In Shining Armor’s impeccable hoofwriting, it said:

I adore you, Kheydinss

The alicorn cleared her throat. “Shine... darling. I love you. And... I’m not mad. *Really.* I’m not going to hurt you. There’s no need for the shield.”

From behind the triply-reinforced translucent pink barrier erected over his side of the bed, Shining Armor smiled as he made himself comfortable. “I love you, too... but I’m *not* falling for that again.”