

THE DAY I FOUND OUT I'D BEEN MISPRONOUNCING MY STAGE MANAGER'S NAME FOR THE LAST THREE YEARS

By Bradley Walton

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MR./MRS. BRADFORD: A high school library secretary, drama director, forensics coach, and published playwright. Bradford wears a dress shirt, tie, and dress pants.

KATHERINE HENNINGER: A student. She is Bradford's stage manager, captain of the forensics team, and a soon-to-be published playwright. Katherine wears contemporary teenager attire.

SETTING: A school library. A book cart with a few books can be used to help establish the setting, but a bare stage is also fine.

AT RISE: BRADFORD is crossing to KATHERINE, who is holding a notebook. If performed in competition where props cannot be used, the notebook may be mimed.

BRADFORD: Sorry about the interruption, Katherine.

KATHERINE: No problem, Mr. Bradford. Your main job in the school is the library. It's kind of a given that helping people find books takes priority ahead of drama, forensics, and critiquing my writing.

BRADFORD: Thanks. Where were we?

KATHERINE: (*gesturing to the notebook*) The ending.

BRADFORD: Right. It needs more oomph. I think if you can just beef that up, it'll be a pretty solid script. Maybe you can get this one published, too.

KATHERINE: I'm hoping so.

BRADFORD: I'm jealous. My scripts have been getting published for years now, but there's no way I could've had one accepted when I was your age.

KATHERINE: I got lucky.

BRADFORD: Maybe, but it was still an impressive piece of writing for a junior in high school.

KATHERINE: I've got a ways to go to catch up with you.

BRADFORD: I hope so. I'm a lot older than you.

KATHERINE: (*handing him a piece of paper out of her notebook*) Here.

BRADFORD: What's this?

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KATHERINE: The other thing I was working on last night. I assigned specific jobs to each member of our stage crew and wrote everything out.

BRADFORD: Excellent. You're a great stage manager, you know that?

KATHERINE: Yeah. Because you keep telling me.

BRADFORD: I wouldn't say it if it wasn't true. You still planning to do it again next year?

KATHERINE: Of course.

BRADFORD: I've never had a four year stage manager before. I doubt there are too many of those around. Probably going to look really good on your college applications if you try to get into a theater program somewhere. *(beat)* You graduate next year and my life is going to suck. Not only will it throw off my sense of order not seeing you here in the library every morning, but I've gotten way too used to having you run things backstage for me.

KATHERINE: What about the forensics program?

BRADFORD: There's that, too. I've also gotten way too used to having you manage the team. Next year I'm going to be sitting at commencement and when I hear the name "Katherine Henninger," *(pronounces it HEN-NING-ER)* I'm going to burst into tears because at that moment, it's going to sink in that I'm going to have to start doing everything for myself again.

KATHERINE: Um . . . it's Hen-nuh-grr.

BRADFORD: It's what?

KATHERINE: Hen-nuh-grr.

BRADFORD: Hen-*nuh*-grr?

KATHERINE: Yeah.

BRADFORD: You mean I've been mispronouncing your name for the past three years?

KATHERINE: Yeah.

BRADFORD: And you're just now telling me?

KATHERINE: I've been meaning to mention it for a while.

BRADFORD: Three years is a pretty long while.

KATHERINE: But I know you've heard me say my last name before.

BRADFORD: Well, yeah. I guess so.

KATHERINE: You have.

BRADFORD: Yeah. Now that I think about it.

KATHERINE: Didn't it register with you that there was something different between what I was saying and what you were saying?

BRADFORD: I guess. I mean, I probably just figured you were pronouncing your name wrong.

KATHERINE: You thought that I was mispronouncing my own name?

BRADFORD: Do you doubt that we have students in this school who are incapable of saying their own names correctly?

KATHERINE: I don't doubt it at all. But I'm kind of insulted that you thought I was one of them.

BRADFORD: We all have lapses.

KATHERINE: I have been your stage manager for the past three years. I am captain of the forensics team. I am a soon-to-be published writer. And you think I can't pronounce my own last name?

BRADFORD: Thought. Past tense. I don't think that now.

KATHERINE: You were thinking it less than three minutes ago. That's not very far in the past. Three years ago, before you knew me, maybe that would have been okay. Three minutes ago—after you've been trusting me to run both your plays and your forensics program, yet you were thinking I couldn't say my own last name—that really brings your judgment into question.

BRADFORD: It's not like you need to be able to pronounce your own name correctly to run a forensics program.

KATHERINE: I guess it's a good thing the state forensics rules prohibit me from using a piece I wrote myself. Guess I'd have been screwed if I'd had to say my own name in the introduction.

BRADFORD: You sound upset.

KATHERINE: I am upset!

BRADFORD: I'm sorry. You should have corrected me sooner.

KATHERINE: You should have trusted me to be able to pronounce my own name!

BRADFORD: I probably just thought I heard you wrong.

KATHERINE: You're back peddling.

BRADFORD: Look, there's an N in front of the G in your last name. H-E-N-N-I-N-G-E-R.

KATHERINE: I know how to spell my last name.

BRADFORD: That's not what I meant.

KATHERINE: Then what did you mean?

BRADFORD: It's a silent N!

KATHERINE: I know that!

BRADFORD: I didn't!

KATHERINE: You would if you'd paid attention.

BRADFORD: But it's so counterintuitive! E's are supposed to be silent! Not N's! Who ever heard of a silent N?

KATHERINE: Anybody named Henninger.

BRADFORD: Come on! A silent N is like a silent Z.

KATHERINE: There's no such thing as a silent Z.

BRADFORD: That's my point.

KATHERINE: It's not the same. N's blend in with other letters to create unique sounds. Like the "ing" in "mispronouncing." No matter what other letters you stick next to a Z, it still sounds like a Z.

BRADFORD: A blended N is not the same as a silent N.

KATHERINE: But it stands to reason that if you could blend the N, then the N could be silent.

BRADFORD: So I'm supposed to look at your name on paper and think, "Hmm. Her name has three N's. N can be used in conjunction with I and G to create the "ing" sound. Therefore it could also be silent." That's like saying the wall is made out of cinder blocks, therefore it could also be doughnuts.

KATHERINE: That doesn't make any sense.

BRADFORD: Exactly! For that matter, the silent N in Henninger looks like it should be part of an "ing" construction. The example you're using is the exact thing I'm pronouncing. It's rational. It's logical. It's common sense. It's the way the language works. Not some counterintuitive stealth letter.

KATHERINE: You like that word, don't you?

BRADFORD: What word?

KATHERINE: Counterintuitive. You've used it twice so far in this conversation. It's not something that you hear every day.

BRADFORD: What's that supposed to mean?

KATHERINE: Nothing.

BRADFORD: Then why are you bringing it up?

KATHERINE: No reason.

BRADFORD: If there was no reason, you wouldn't have said it.

KATHERINE: It just says something about you, I guess.

BRADFORD: Says what?

KATHERINE: The fact that you would even use that word in casual conversation . . .

BRADFORD: I think we passed the point of this being a casual conversation a while ago. This is an argument.

KATHERINE: Intuition is a pretty personal thing. And by you accusing something of being counterintuitive, it's like you're saying you believe the world should conform to your expectations.

BRADFORD: Expecting the letter N to make a sound is perfectly normal and reasonable. It has nothing to do with me personally. What good is a silent N, anyway? What's it even doing there?

KATHERINE: I have no idea. I was born with it. I didn't choose it. I certainly didn't make it up on my own. But you raising the question definitely shows that you're imposing your personal prejudices on the world.

BRADFORD: I'm prejudiced?

KATHERINE: Yeah.

BRADFORD: Against silent N's?

KATHERINE: I'd say that's pretty obvious.

BRADFORD: That's ridiculous.

KATHERINE: If you weren't, you wouldn't keep pressing the issue.

BRADFORD: I'm only pressing the issue because you wouldn't let me off the hook when I tried to apologize!

KATHERINE: You never apologized.

BRADFORD: I said I was sorry!

KATHERINE: You said you were sorry for upsetting me. Not for saying my name wrong.

BRADFORD: You're keeping track?

KATHERINE: It's my job to keep track of stuff for you.

BRADFORD: But you're not supposed to turn around and use it against me!

KATHERINE: I'm doing it to make you a better person.

BRADFORD: You're what?

KATHERINE: I'm pointing out your flawed reasoning and the inconsistencies in what you've said in order to teach you to pay more attention to yourself and especially the world around you so you don't try to impose your expectations where they aren't wanted and make yourself look like a jerk in the process.

BRADFORD: Jeez, Katherine, why don't you just hit me?

KATHERINE: For one thing, I'd get expelled. For another, people would stare, and it would seriously undermine what little credibility you've got left to get punched by a student in front of everyone in the library.

(BRADFORD looks around.)

BRADFORD: Maybe you hadn't noticed, but everyone in the library is staring at us already. I think they're actually expecting us to get in a fist fight. Try to calm down, okay?

KATHERINE: You could say you're sorry.

BRADFORD: I did.

KATHERINE: No. For the other thing.

BRADFORD: Which other thing?

KATHERINE: Butchering my name.

BRADFORD: Right. That other thing. But I didn't butcher it. More like I shaved a little off the edges.

(The exchange becomes quieter here.)

KATHERINE: People are still staring.

BRADFORD: You're right. They are. And you know—if I apologize now, word's going to spread that I backed down to a student, and it's going to hurt my reputation.

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