

E PLURIBUS UNUM

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In most instances, one adds an S to pluralize a word: all well and good. But when a second S is added, interesting things begin to happen; suddenly, the word becomes singular again, or takes on an altogether new meaning -- ADVENTURES becomes ADVENTURESS, or CARES becomes CARESS. The latter word-pair is the basis for a famous riddle by George Canning, a British statesman who served for a brief time as Prime Minister of England:

A word there is of plural number,
Foe to ease and tranquil slumber;
Any other word you take
And add an s will plural make.
But if you add an s to this,
So strange the metamorphosis;
Plural is plural now no more,
And sweet what bitter was before.

Try your hand at identifying the following dual-identity words:

1. brittle wafers + S = degree of seasoning
2. undergarments + S = metal
3. gleams + S = lackluster
4. wealthy people + S = wealthy woman
5. trees + S = lost
6. armed groups + S = own
7. holy books + S = messy baby
8. French friends + S = something wrong
9. royal heirs + S = royal heiress
10. musical horns + S = free of insects

Answers can be found in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.

Note that examples 4 and 9, as well as ADVENTURES - ADVENTURESS, are less interesting in that they merely convert the same base from a plural group to a female member of that group. Can Word Ways readers find other examples in which the base changes, as in CARES - CARESS?