

March 2017 Contest Stories:

“They say you learn from your mistakes...”

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Winning Story:

The Bright Idea

By: Ryana Lynn

Note: This story is about the same characters from “Love Conquers All”, but takes place before it chronologically. You may also notice that Mitch is not mentioned. That’s a story for another time.

They say you learn from your mistakes. Not always.

Salem Springfield well knew that Becca, his sister, was a jumpy person. Very jumpy. And when startled, Becca often over reacts. Like the time when they were younger and he threw a rubber snake at her while they were working in the garden. She had screamed and thrown her hoe...barely missing Salem’s head. There were many other such incidents...far too many to list now.

Well today, they had been conveniently forgotten. He had returned earlier than expected from deployment and was finally going to get to do a surprise homecoming to his parents and siblings. After doing a little reconnaissance, he found out from a neighbor that everyone was home, except Becca and their younger brother Jason. They had run to the store for some ice cream and should be just about home.

It was getting late when Salem ducked behind their family’s small outbuilding. He saw headlights and watched at Becca pulled her dark green Volkswagen Bug into the driveway. He grinned. It was time.

He snuck around behind her car as Jason stepped out, holding the cartons of ice cream. “I hope we got the right kind of Butter Pecan,” Jason said. “You know how particular Tim is about his ice cream.”

Becca, who was still sitting in the driver’s seat, putting her keys away and impromptu cleaning out her purse in the process, laughed and continued rifling through the pockets. “I think I got the right kind...Jason, where’s my cell phone?”

“In the cup holder where you put it earlier,” Jason called, closing his door and heading for the house.

“Thanks,” Becca laughed, unplugging the device and putting it in its proper place. Salem noticed she was carrying the purse he had gotten her for her twentieth birthday. It was a patchwork style purse, featuring four different kinds of military camo, since they had family in each of those branches.

Finally, Becca stood and closed the car door, dug through her purse to get her keys back out, locked the door and replaced the keys. She was so predictable. She placed her purse on her right shoulder and headed for the house.

Salem made his move. He silently came up behind her and touched her arm, saying, "Hey, Becca!"

It all happened so fast, Salem was completely caught off guard. Becca screamed at the top of her lungs, whirled around and sprayed Salem in the face with her infamous can of Pepper spray...the one thing Salem had forgotten about her routine. She always carried it with her.

"Oh, my eyes!" Salem gasped, tripping backwards to the ground as Becca continued to scream. Jason came barreling out of the house with Tim, Randy and Dad on his heels. Every house light in the base housing neighborhood came on, or so it seemed.

"You just stay right there!" Randy, the oldest of the Springfield boys, ordered.

"Randy, it's me!" Salem choked, fighting the urge to rub his eyes. That would only make the situation worse.

"Salem?" Tim shouted. "What are you trying to do? Get yourself killed?" he added, holstering his pistol.

Becca turned as reality sunk in. "Oh, Salem! I'm so sorry!"

Mom joined her family and when she saw, aided by Jason's flashlight, Randy helping Salem up, she immediately took control of the situation. "Get him to the kitchen sink!"

"Is everything alright?"

Dad turned and saw their neighbor MSGT. Williams shouting from his porch. With a smirk, Dad called back, "It's all good. Just a surprise homecoming."

Williams laughed. "Sounded more like a cat fight!"

"When pepper spray's involved, that's about right," Dad replied.

"Oh no! You've got to tell me about this tomorrow, Doc!"

"Will do."

Meanwhile inside, Salem was holding his head over the sink while his mother sprayed cold water in his eyes from the sink hose.

Rachel and Mary hurried down the stairs. "What happened?" Mary asked in alarm, observing what looked like a drowning in process.

"Salem's home," was all Jason could manage. Mary stared at her older brothers gathered around the sink. She looked at Rachel, then Becca, who explained what had happened.

"That was real bright," Rachel snickered, patting her younger brother on the shoulder.

Salem wrinkled his nose at her. "Who's bright idea was it to give Becca Pepper spray?" Salem defended, drying his eyes.

Randy grinned. "Yours, remember, Jarhead? You better be glad she wasn't carrying her Navy SEAL knife Dad bought last week!"

"You beat all, Salem," Tim said, laughing at his brother's red eyes, still watering from the ordeal.

"Salem, I am so sorry," Becca lamented, her voice quite pitiful. "You really startled me! I shouldn't be on such a hair-trigger."

Salem shook his head and gave his younger sister a side hug. "You did exactly what you should have done in that situation. You had no reason to think it was me and not some lunatic."

"Uh, that's debatable," Dad said with a chuckle. "Seems like she was dealing with a lunatic!" Everyone laughed.

"The mighty Marine taken down by a civilian girl!" Randy teased.

Mom smiled and hugged Salem tightly. "Welcome home, son! It's so good to have you back!"

"Thanks! I was wondering if that part of my presence had been forgotten!" Salem said, hugging her back.

Welcomes and hugs were exchanged by the family, their ice cream snack turning into a welcome home celebration. Salem smiled. It was so good to be home with his family. *Dear Lord, he prayed silently, thank You for our family. Thank You for letting us get back together, all safe and sound. Please protect us in the days ahead and guide us through whatever You may choose to bring our way...and help me learn from my mistakes!...*

"Jimmy, Really"

By: Victoria Minks

They say you learn from your mistakes.

I always had been a risk-taker. My mother prefers to call this "trouble-maker". I was the boy in the neighborhood who jumped from woodshed roofs and sprained his ankles and raced his horse at break-neck speed down the dunes. I was the boy who fought in the schoolyard (but it was their faults to begin with I promise), I was the one that the teachers sent to the corner, the boy who had pocketfuls of firecrackers, and the boy with mischief in his eye.

Mother would always say I need to behave myself. Father said I ought to act like a gentleman. My teacher used to throw up her hands and wail, "Would you PLEASE be good!" Grandfather cut through it all and shouted at me to stop my shenanigans. The only one who ever did treat me respectable like is Gwen.

Gwen's just a few years older than me, and I remember the day I met her perfectly. Her hair looks like the yellow inside of a daisy, and the first time I saw her I threw a cricket on her. She was sixteen then, three years older than me, and I was eager to hear a rousing good scream. She didn't though, only jumped sky-high, brushed the poor cricket off of her, and set her jaw. It wasn't until Will Jenkins made my sister Lizzy cry when I saw what Gwen was made of. She marched straight up, smacked me across the head with her book and said "Shame!" I'm not sure what I was supposed to be ashamed about, but for some reason, I felt it. Lizzy was fourteen then, and hopping mad. At first, she liked Gwen, but before long, she changed her mind and thought Gwen was just awful. Pretty, but awful. When I asked her why Lizzy turned up her nose and said it was because of Gwen's "'ssociations" which of course meant me-- Jimmy Mulligan.

The trouble is, I never did aim to cause a ruckus. It just happened. Gwen was from a city somewhere else, and she didn't stand for me being mean, so she used to say. "You got to be respectable."

"That's what everyone says," I would always grumble. We used to go fishing together-- me and Gwen and Will Jenkins.

"Oh, no, don't do it for them-- don't do it for anybody but Jesus and yourself," Gwen would get so intense when she spoke that her words burst out of her loud-like and she would scare away the blackbirds which had settled on the trees above. I tried after that, but no one seemed to notice but Gwen. "Oh, that's just fine!" she'd beam, while everyone else would go "Jimmy, really." I always meant to make myself turn out all right. I think the folks thought that I was behind everything bad that happened though, even if I wasn't. I wouldn't be surprised if they thought I started this War. But it never did matter to me what they thought. It didn't even matter what Will Jenkins thought, though we were such good friends. It only mattered what

Jesus thought, although deep down I wanted Gwen to be proud of me too-- it always was so awful uncomfortable when she was unhappy with me. I just wanted to do what was right, and every step I took seemed to mess things up worse.

Signing up to fight in the War seemed like a good thing to do at the time. I was eighteen and people still thought I was a school-age hooligan. Sure, I still got in scrapes, but it was time to prove I was a man.

It wasn't until I charged up without orders and found myself face-to-face with eleven Germans that I knew how bad of a mistake I was capable of making. When I was sitting, prisoner of the Germans, I thought it was too late to learn. I thought that I was done for. They would shoot me and then-- then I would never be able to show Gwen how glad I was we were friends, and she'd think that I turned out bad after all. I guess the Lord sometimes gives chances to those who should have used them all up a long time ago, though. If God isn't grace, I don't know what is. And I guess He showed me I can use my quick mind for Him, if I allow it. Escaping was easy once God put it in my mind.

Getting shot through the leg as I ran didn't hurt as much as hearing the doctor in the hospital days later. I never knew one leg could mean so much to a fellow until after I lost it. That's when I realized that there's a lot in life like that. If I ever did make any mistake it was taking for granted what I had...but if I should have lost any of it I knew I'd be cut through, it meant that much to me.

"Have you got a wife?" the doctor asked me, writing things on papers.

"Why, of all things, no!" The idea made me laugh. "I ain't even twenty yet."

The doctor shrugged. "They're sending you home, Private Mulligan."

I knew it then-- discharged for doing my own thing. For running out after them Germans, when everyone else was going along the trenches. Mistakes--mistakes. I wished I could erase them all. What would my mother and father say if they knew? What would everybody in town say? All of a sudden I didn't want to go back.

"I guess they're rather happy about the thirteen soldiers you captured, Private Mulligan," the doctor said, "On your way back from being held prisoner."

"Sure, sure," I sighed. "But they ain't too happy about how I done got captured in the first place, I figure."

The doctor almost smiled. "The Sergeant says you anticipated his orders, and commends you for your bravery. He's only sorry the loss of your leg causes you to leave the ranks. I believe he is willing to forgive the fact that you went before his orders."

I sat up. "Say, that's something!" The doctor nodded and left the room and I was left to think. They say you learn from your mistakes. Well, maybe it's true. I know folks think I NEVER do, but I really think I have. Maybe I learned what's most important after all. Maybe I'll keep making stupid mistakes and getting into trouble my whole life, but at least I'd know who I cared about, and what made life so good, and how God loves even people who mess things up like me. Even if the rest of my town couldn't see past my blunders, I knew that Jesus could. And Gwen. And boy, wouldn't her eyes shine when I got home, even if everyone else shook their heads and said, "Jimmy, really."

The Pastor's Kids' & the Deacon's Kids' Feud: A Tale of Christian Love

By Katja L.

They say you learn from your mistakes. All I can say is, Thaddeus and Titus don't. And neither do Joanna, Ezekiel, or Mark.

We're the Hopes. Father is the Pastor of Hope Baptist Church. (No, it's not named after us. It just happened to be the name of the church. But everyone thinks that is such a funny coincidence.)

Mother is the Pastor's Wife and the Pianist and she arranges lots of the special singing. Abel is Assistant Pastor, and Prisca is the Nursery Lady, since they have Baby Enoch. Bartholomew is the Singing Leader. Julia is the girl who takes care of the sound in recording and stuff. Nahum is the Sunday School Teacher for the older boys, and Aquila for the younger boys, and Claudia for the older girls, and Phœbe for the younger girls. And Thaddeus and Titus and I make up the rest of the Pastor's Kids.

We sit on the back row, so Julia can keep an eye on us during the service. This is all fine and dandy, 'cause we can see everything that goes on, and hear lots better when people pray, 'cause all the Deacons sit near there. But there's only one hic. And it's a biggy.

Here it is:

THE WEBB KIDS SIT RIGHT ACROSS THE AISLE FROM US.

The Webb kids are Joanna, Ezekiel, Mark, Jeremiah, Obadiah, Hosea, Malachi, Joel, Ezra, and Isaiah. It's only Jo and Izzy and Markie who are the problems. The others are too old and don't pay us any attention. Not like Jo and Izzy and Markie, at any rate.

Jo is ten, like me. Izzy is nine, like Titus. And Markie is eleven, like Thaddeus. And this is why they're a big problem.

When we first came to church, Jo boasted that HER family was the best behaved in church. Of course we didn't like that. So as soon as the Webbs walk in, we are paragons. Unfortunately, so are they.

I don't think anyone else notices our feud. Except maybe Mary. Else she wonders why we're so good. But I don't think Deacon or Mrs. Webb notice, or Mother, or Father, or Jeremiah, or Obadiah, or Hosea, or Malachi, or Joel, or Ezra, or Isaiah, or Abel, or Prisca, or Bartholomew, or his fiancée Jemima, or Julia, or Nahum, or Aquila, or Claudia, or Phœbe. And Enoch definitely doesn't. But we feud about EVERYTHING. Even about the size of our family. We're equal, or just about. Jeremiah and Debora had Baby Susanna right after Enoch was born. We even feud about our cards, when we make them for the Missionaries.

So our mistakes were made at the summer picnic. I poured lemonade all down my front (my arms are too long for me and they don't know what to do with themselves until the rest of me catches up, so they are always quick to knock things around, or drop them, or do something clumsy like that). So Jo poked her nose up in the air and said "what a pity it was that the pastor's daughter had to wear a bib and use a sippycup." SHE thought that my nephew would have taken that over, but maybe I just wasn't as mature as she was.

That made me plenty mad, I can tell you. (I have lots of red hair, so I have lots of red temper too.) So I said it was a pity the Deacon's son wouldn't read his Bible.

That made her mad, 'eause she hates being called Jo and when I tease her about being Jo with an "e" like a boy. She got all red and didn't know what to say. Then Markie came by and offered me a bib, all sweet and smiling.

Well, I'd just had a fuss with Thaddeus, because he threw the baseball too hard and it'd hitten me, but when he saw Markie doing that, he fired up and told "Markie Dickie" to stop it. That made Mark mad, and so he called Thaddeus "the wus kid he'd ever seen."

I thought that was a pretty smart way to make fun of Thaddeus' name, but I didn't tell him that, you could bet your boots. Titus yelled at Markie to leave his brother alone, and Izzy said that his big brother could jolly well do what he wanted. So Titus called him Izzy, and Izzy called him Tiny, and they started screaming at each other, and Markie and Jo screamed at Thaddeus and me to shut up our brother, and Thaddeus and I screamed at Markie and Jo to shut up THEIR brother, when suddenly Titus fell and skinned his knee real bad. There was blood everywhere. And then we made our mistakes.

Mistake #1: Markie said that if Titus left it alone, it'd quit bleeding. Only it didn't.

Mistake #2: Thaddeus said to use his pants to stop the bleeding, 'cause the blood wouldn't show. Only it did.

Mistake #3: Izzy said that we shouldn't show our mother so she wouldn't worried or grossed out. Only we did (later).

Mistake #4: Titus thought that if he'd get up and bleed less. Only it didn't.

Mistake #5: Jo said that we should make him lie down so it'd bleed less. Only it didn't.

So then we began screaming at each other even more, when suddenly we felt a hand on our shoulders and we looked up and saw Father.

I tell you, I wished I hadn't looked up. He looked so greived and stern, I just about cried. But everyone shut up. Then he told me and Titus and Thaddeus to go sit on the steps for a while and Bartholomew bandaged up Titus. Then he looked at us and Titus had a big stain on his best pants. Bartholomew said that we should go home and soak it so it'd go away. Then Mama found it and got all worried about why Titus had blood on his pants.

That evening, Papa asked us what we thought we were doing, fighting like that. I looked at Thaddeus and Thaddeus looked at me and then he looked at Papa and said, "She insulted my little sister."

I didn't really like that, because I'm not that littler than he, but I kept quiet. Titus piped in that they'd insulted his brother so he had to stand up for him.

Pretty soon Papa knew all about the feud. Then he looked at us very quietly.

"Children, do you think the Lord was pleased when he looked down and saw six of His children fighting like cats and dogs?"

We all hung our heads.

Papa shook his. "The Bible says, 'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.' I don't think I need to paraphrase that."

We all shook our heads too.

"But they're nasty sometimes," Thaddeus objected.

"People were more than nasty to Jesus, but he only kept quiet. You hold your tongue and see if that helps. 'The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with.' And if you love them, like you are supposed to, you will find that 'love covereth all sins.'"

When we went to church the next day, I went straight to Joanna and Mark and Ezekiel and apologized for calling them names and saying mean things, and so did Thaddeus and Titus.

And you know what? They did too! And now we are BFFs.

So if you don't like someone, just try to pretend he is Jesus and treat him like you'd treat Jesus, and pretty soon you won't not like them anymore. And besides, God is Love, so shouldn't His children be too?

But you know what? Yesterday Mark and Joanna and Ezekiel and Thaddeus and Titus went hiking and Titus scrapped his knee again. And they did they same things. So that's how I know they didn't learn from their mistakes.

But I did.

Grave Mistake

By Elizabeth Sparrow

They say you can learn from your mistakes.

"No!" I screech stretching my arms out to the rock ledge.

"Angelina!" It all happened in a flash Olivia dropped to the ground, her chest slammed against the rock ledge.

She inched forward. And reached out her hand grasping the air for mine.

With everything in me I screamed. I furiously clawed at the smooth cliffside as I fell.

My hand found a dead tree sticking out and I grasped it, abruptly stopping short my fall.

"Olivia help!" I called up, my strength was wavering, and I did not know how long the branch would hold. I heard my voice echoing off the walls. I slide my free hand over the rock wall, trying to find an ledge.

"I won't last long hurry!" I called again and again, but to no reply.

I found a ledge and shifted my weight. I was a professional rock climber so I knew what to do.

I found a third foothole lower near my left foot, I shifted again so that my weight was supported equally.

Glancing up the rock wall I realized that it was quite smooth and only had the pockmarks and ledges here and there, like where I am.

"Thank you Lord, I know you are in control and know whats going to happen."

I called again.

"Hello! I need help I am stuck!"

A rope flipped over the edge, landing beside my right foot just a couple inches away.

Quickly shifting my weight I freed my right hand and grasped the rope.

I wound it through the belt loops on my skirt, and made a knot. Then tugged three times.

"Okay! I am hooked up!" I called up.

Slowly I felt the rope being pulled up. Soon I was dangling above the deep canyon. I planted my feet against the wall started walking while pulling myself up.

I was almost to the edge when I remembered what Master Mini always said "When climbing always ALWAYS watch out for Rams"

I stopped short. 'What if they captured Olivia? I thought to myself.

Rams was a group of terrorists that would steal children and adults from the mountains as they climbed. They then would force them to convert, or die.

"Olivia!" I called out almost to the top.

No reply, who was up there?

Pulling myself up I looked around.

Three figures clothed in black robes with black masks covering their faces stood against the wall. Another two were at the end of the rope straining to pull me up.

"Angelina!" A familiar voice called out.

"Olivia?" I looked around while untying the rope and reaching for my knife.

"Angelina don't do that" the shortest figure in the back said.

Olivia! My heart leaped. shes okay! then a crushing weight came down as I realized, she one of them.

I held up my hands and slowly walked away from the edge and around the people.

"Olivia whats goin on?" I asked glancing around. beneath me was red-brown rock, to my left was a wall of the same rock and to my right was a sheer drop.

"I am only 14! I have a whole life ahead of me! We were friends what happened?" I asked pain filling my voice. I snuck a quick glance behind me, no one was there just a rock wall.

/shoot! I am boxed in/ I thought to myself.

"Angelina" Olivia paused while motioning to the others she advanced. "This is my life, they are my family! They have promised me great things as I serve their god!"

They others have not said a word, but the tallest one interjected in a deep voice.

"You can have it all too" he motioned around. "You could own all of this and come climbing anytime you want, all you have to do is bow and give glory to the great Ramsalem." His voice was filled with awe at the name of his god.

My mind flashed to the Bible in Luke 4, when Jesus was tempted by the Devil. Specifically verses 4 and 5 when Satan brought Jesus up to a high mountain and promised him all he saw, if he worshipped him.

"No" I firmly stated. "Olivia how could you? I thought you loved the Lord! I thought you were a Christian!"

Olivia pulled back her black mask, freeing her long blonde hair. I was always jealous of her hair.

"Oh, you are so gullible, you went along with the plan all along totally unaware that I was really..." She paused a wicked grin on her face. "To use a Bible term, I am a wolf in sheeps clothing. And you didn't suspect a thing! If your God is so great why did he not keep you from this mess?" She gestured to towards the rock wall behind me. "You have no way out, you are stuck, cornered, no place to run, get the picture?" Olivia advanced towards me.

I quickly assessed the situation, the four Rams behind Olivia had bulges underneath their cloaks.

Guns

Lord help me! I thought to myself.

I took a more careful look at the wall to my left, it had indents and ledges all over it, most in little clusters while some looked as if they were just thrown at the rock, not caring where they landed.

"Angelina, listen all you have to do is bow to the great Ramsalem! And this can be all over"

The tallest (a boy at about 16 or 17) stepped over to her with the rope.

"But...do you really believe that I can have all this?" I lifted my arms toward the heavens. please Lord let them take the bait I prayed.

The Rams in the back looked at each other and nodded.

"Of course Angelina! And you can have so much more!"

I glanced back at the wall behind me.

here it goes I thought to myself then said.

"You know what Olivia? I think...NO!" I sprang towards her shoving her against the others in the back, one teetered at the edge of the canyon trying to gain its balance.

The others rushed to help.

While they were distracted for a second I ran to the wall and started pulling myself up, I was almost to the top when they started firing bullets.

"Lord help!" I cried over the roar of the guns.

A rope came down from the ledge and I held on, and I was pulled up out of the range of bullets.

I wish I had learned my lesson, for over the ledge was a jeep sitting on the smooth dirt road just a few feet away, and in front of me was 8 figures all armed with guns.

The Last Letter

by Abigail P.

They say you learn from your mistakes. And, well, I don't know if you'll believe this or not, but I have. I've changed. I mean it...for the better. I hope you'll forgive me for the fool I've been.

*My love always,
Your brother*

Jinger let the letter fall to her lap. Tears were streaming down her face.

I've changed...for the better.

When had this happened? She glanced to the top of the slip of paper to the date that hadn't quite registered when she saw it the first time. May 08, 1904. Seven years? She had gone for nearly seven years without knowing of her brother's miraculous change of heart? Twelve years prior, the summer of 1899, was the last time she had ever seen her brother. That was the day he had told her he was finished with her, with God, and with the faith that had defined their family since before Jinger was born. She remembered that day like it was yesterday.

She was crying, begging. "Chad, please, don't go. You can't leave. You'll break Mother and Father's hearts."

At that moment, he had hesitated, and she thought for a fraction of a second he might actually change his mind. But then his gaze hardened. He ignored her begging pleas, picked up his bag, and walked out of her life forever. She hadn't seen or heard from him since that day, and

never once had she considered that he might have had a change of heart...until now. Jinger leaned her head against the window and allowed her mind to wander back, back through the craziness her life had become in the last few days. This morning began like any other, except for the fact that she had woken up in her deceased brother's house. She had met her nephew for the first time yesterday. Then she had found the letter, hidden away in a desk on the second floor, the letter that would change her life. If only she had known about this before. She would have gladly welcomed Chad's return to their family. Had he meant to never mail it? She walked over to the desk where she had first found the letter, and ran her finger over the smooth cherry wood.

"Why, Chad? I hope you knew that I forgave you, that...that I love you."

"Aunt Jinger?"

Jinger turned to see her seven year old nephew standing in the doorway.

"Hi, Carl."

She reached out a hand, and he came to her.

"Why are you crying, Aunt Jinger?" His innocent gaze nearly broke her heart. He looked so much like Chad.

"Are you crying because of Dad?"

She smiled through her tears. "Yes, I am."

Carl was cuddled up against her, but now he wiggled his hands around her and snuggled up closer to her side.

"How come I never met you before?"

She brushed her fingers through his strawberry blond locks. They hadn't gotten into this much last night. They had arrived at Chad's house at 7:00, nearly Carl's bedtime. Jinger and her mother, her only family member still living, hadn't made it to bed until nearly 11:00. But by then, Jinger couldn't sleep, her mind all but consumed with thoughts of her once best friend--her brother. She had lain awake for a while but, unable to sleep, had wandered about the second floor until she found a desk in one of the other rooms. A desk with a letter written in her brother's handwriting--addressed to her.

"Because...your dad left our family a very long time ago."

Chad had said he wanted a new life, to be successful. She gazed around the magnificent room, only a fraction of the mansion her brother had called his own before he died. He certainly had done that. She gave a sad chuckle. The only thing she had heard from her brother in years was the telegram from Chad's lawyer insisting they come immediately. She was shocked to find she had a nephew, a nephew with no father...or mother. Jinger had never met her sister in law. Apparently the woman had died in childbirth. Jinger hadn't even known her brother was married until they had arrived the night before.

"What's that?"

Carl was peering at the letter she still held in her hand.

"Ohhh..." she had nearly forgotten. "Just something your father wrote to me."

Carl's eyes grew wide, and then, without any warning, he tore from her grasp, and raced down the hall. He was back moments later waving a white envelope in his hand.

"See?" He was out of breath. He handed the envelope to her, and before she even had it in her hand, she knew what it was. She gasped. "Carl..."

He grinned widely. "It's from Dad. See?" He pointed to the handwriting.

"Carl." She held up the envelope. "Where did you get this?"

A shadow passed over the young boy's face, and some of the excitement from earlier was gone.

"When Dad was dying, he gave the letter to me, and...and he told me not to open it. He told me that I had an aunt and that when you came I should give you the letter, so..." His head was down, his foot making small nervous circles in the carpet. She could hear it in his voice--he was trying not to cry. As was she.

"Oh, Carl..." she pulled him close again, and they stood that way for several seconds, each lost in thought.

"So..." Carl's head resurfaced, and he wiped at his tears with his sleeve. "Are you going to open it?"

She grinned at him and led him over to the desk where they both took a seat. She slid the letter opener beneath the flap and popped the seal. She read the date. April 19, 1911. Only three days prior.

Dear Sis,

I'm sorry for how I've hurt you...

The letter read much like the other one. She didn't understand why he would write two until she came to the end.

I've made other attempts at writing you a letter like this one, but never have I had the courage to send it. I let you down. I was your hero. I'm so sorry, Jing. I love you. I want you to know that this house, the nice things you see that I own, none of it compares with what I had with you and Mom and Dad, in that little cottage on Silver Way Drive. I searched for success, and got it. But never did I think it would feel like this--empty...useless. I hope you can forgive me. Please, take care of my son. He's the reason for my change. The day he was born, I looked into his precious little baby boy eyes, and only then did I realize the consequences of my wrong choices and all that I had cost him. The love of grandparents, of aunts and uncles. The love of a mother. After Sherry died, I felt as if life itself had ceased to go on. I couldn't come to you, not after I had turned my back on you. So, I stayed. And, dear sister, I hope you can forgive me for my grievous error. I'm not sure when you will read this. I fear I will not last another night in my present condition. I am giving this letter to Carl with instructions to give it to you.

'Till we meet again, Dear Sister,

Your loving brother,

Chad

Jinger stared, unwilling to believe that these were the last words she would ever have from her brother. Her earlier attempt to keep her eyes dry was abandoned as tear after tear rolled down her face and unto her lap. The other letter must have been a failed attempt, one Chad truly hadn't meant for her to see. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw her nephew, who had sat politely at her side while she read the letter, slip his hand into his pocket and pull out a handkerchief.

He held it out to her. "Here you go, Aunt Jinger."

Aunt Jinger. She could get used to that.

"Thanks, Honey." She took the handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes.

He twisted his hands in his lap. "So...is everything okay, now?" He hesitated. "Can...can you be my mom?"

Jinger's heart melted at her nephew's sweet gaze.

"Of course I can, Sweetheart."

His eyes grew big, and he grinned widely. "I'm gonna go tell Nurse!"

Jinger chuckled as she watched him go. She rose to follow him but hesitated as her eyes fell on the letter. Then, without a second thought, she opened a drawer inside the desk and placed both letters from Chad inside, closing it softly. Her fingers lingered for a moment on the handle, and she gave a small smile.

"Till we meet again...Dear Brother."

And with that, she rose and followed her nephew out of the room and into their new life...together.

They Say You Learn From Your Mistakes

By: A.L.

They say you learn from your mistakes. But I never do. Miriam learned in 30 minutes that if she came too close to that stupid ol' cow, it'd switch her good! Robert learned things quickly too. Maybe I'm just the dunce of the family?! Anyway, seems it's always me who swings on the pigpen gate and falls in the muck. And I'm always the one who falls in the pond on our fishing trips.

I thought I was hopeless until I met Rosie McConer. She is WAAAAAY worse than me when I cook. She burns her fingers EVERY time she cooks. But when we went climbing, I found I WAS still hopeless! Of course I had to step on that rotten ol' branch halfway up (I ALWAYS step on it). Then I was laid up for a week. THEN, of course, I had to show her that I could do it and... down I went again. This time I broke my right arm (the one I always use). Then I said I gave up. (But I'm still trying!!! And now I've broken my wrist! Guess I'll HAVE to learn.)