



I'm sorry if this is a tad late, but I had some family issues that had to be dealt with. I know that the Silver Platter is the social and cultural highlight of your month, and that your life has been a bleak void since not receiving it in your email on the 15th, so I apologize.

It's Christmas Time, in Hollis, Queens...

Sorry, sorry...I know it's a little early to start thinking about mistletoe and ugly sweaters. The stores won't even start putting out the decorations until October 5th or so. But I'm proud and fortunate to announce that I'll have to worry about it just a little sooner. I've been selected as one of writers who will be crafting a story for the Country Christmas Love Anthology! I'll be working with many other authors, including Susan Meachen, Kelly Kidd, and Kelly Erickson, just to name a few. I hope that my contribution is up to the caliber of their writing.

As the name of the anthology suggests, the stories anthology will focus on romantic encounters in a rural setting during Christmas. Best of all, 100% of the royalties will be donated to the Random Acts charity (randomacts.org).

So, if you want to give me a gift this Christmas, you can purchase the anthology as soon as it comes out and let me know you did so. You'll be donating a few dollars to a great charity and enjoying some pretty fine stories that will put you in the holiday mood (even if the leaves have barely started changing).

Check out my website (www.authorjamiesterling.com) for updates as they become available!

Hide the grog an' treasure! It be TLAP Day!

Yes, I know that this sounds a bit uncultured, but September 19th is Talk Like A Pirate Day, and I shamefully admit that the day is one of my guilty pleasures. I even switch my Facebook page from English to English (Pirate)! I don't know why, but it must have something to do with letting loose from the confines of proper grammar and syntax and spend an entire day saying things like:

- *"Avast! Tha cap'n don't take kindly to swabs dippin' their sea monster in the grog!"*
- (While driving) *"Ya scurvy landlubber - next time ye hit yer brakes for no reason, I'll fire me broadside into your portholes!"*
- *"I'm gonna drop me anchor in yer home port and pillage yer castle!"* (Spoken with the right inflection, this can carry a great deal of sexual innuendo)

How is this not fun?

Perhaps my next book will be a pirate love story written entirely in TLAP-speak. What d'ya think?

<http://talklikeapirate.com/wordpress/>

Jamie's Gripe o' the Month – Why the Earl of Sandwich Cries

We all enjoy sandwiches of some sort. They are tasty, convenient, and sometimes even nutritious. You can have them for any meal of the day, and there are many shops that specialize in gourmet sandwiches. Some people even say that things like hamburgers and hot dogs or bagels with cream cheese qualify as sandwiches. I'll buy that.

So, what's my gripe? Poor quality ham? People asking for American cheese? Too much mayonnaise? (By the way, any amount of mayonnaise is too much mayonnaise – that stuff is gross.)

No. It's the simple act of cutting the damn sandwich in half. This should not be a difficult procedure:

1. Lay sandwich on flat surface.
2. Obtain knife.
3. Slice sandwich into two pieces.

Somehow, somehow, Step 3 becomes bungled, especially with a take-out sandwich. I watch as the person behind the counter performs all three steps before handing me my hoagie in a wrapper so I can go on my way. When I get to my car or my desk or wherever, I unwrap it and pick up one half – *only to discover that the sandwich is not cut all the way through*. Now I'm holding part of it an inch from my open mouth, with the bottom piece of bread dangling by a thread of bread and the contents of the other half scattered about the desktop, the floor, and probably the person next to me. All because some hoagie jockey thought that one casual swipe with a knife duller than the edge of a nickel was sufficient.

I'm a believer in offering a solution to the problems I identify. In that spirit, and since I already described the steps of cutting the sandwich in great detail above, I'm going to insert one step and enhance Step 3 (bolded for clarity). This should alleviate the problem and make me a national hero.

1. Lay sandwich on flat surface.
2. Obtain knife.
- 3. Sharpen knife so that it can actually get through warm butter.**
4. Slice sandwich into two pieces, **moving the knife in a back-and-forth motion and ENSURE there is a gap between the knife and the sandwich on both sides.**

If that is just too much for you, I will offer an alternative solution: don't cut it at all.

See how reasonable I can be?

Jamie's Silver-Plated Writing Tip

I'm learning about writing every single day – even days I don't write. Sometimes I'll read a sentence or a paragraph in someone else's book or a news article, and the author's use of words or their turn of phrase or something else will strike me, and I'll stash that technique in my arsenal. And don't think that it has to be from some literary masterpiece. I've noted descriptions of how to make macaroni and cheese that tickled my fancy.

Seeing is one thing, but remembering is another matter. It's really a conundrum. The more you grow as a writer, the more of these little tidbits you'll want to collect and use, but it's really impossible to remember a sentence you read 18 months ago in an article about a road trip through Acadia National Park, no matter how good it was. There is, however, a way to weave these little gems into your own writing without having a notebook full of techniques and tips.

Rewrite.

Don't misunderstand me – I'm not talking about the conventional meaning of the term, where you read a passage you just wrote, realize how bad it is, and start over. That's Writing 101, and we all know how to do that (and how much we hate it). I'm talking about the concept of writing the same topic in many different ways, just for the sake of doing something different.

There's a great scene in the movie *A River Runs Through It*, where the main character hands his father an essay he has written as part of his home-schooling. The father looks it over, makes some marks on the page, and tells his son, "Again. Half as long." This is what I'm talking about.

Write a couple of paragraphs about pretty much anything (or you can use something from a book you are currently writing or have written). It should be a topic with which you are familiar, but other than that it doesn't matter too much. It can be fiction or non-fiction. Then choose a way to rewrite it that is very, very difficult for you. For example, rewrite it without using any adverbs. Maybe change it from third person to first person. Perhaps you will decide that you are going to change every adverb in the story. Or add dialogue. Rewrite every single sentence. Whatever. The only rule is that you can't alter the intent of the story with your rewrite. (And don't discard your original work.)

This forces you to find alternatives to what you like to write, taking you out of your comfort zone to explore new things. Even if you hate the end result of the rewrite, you'll have learned new ways of writing and organizing your prose. You will also learn what doesn't work for you, and you can try to avoid those areas. Subconsciously, you will start to recall all of those things as you craft your book, and that will improve your writing.

This isn't an overnight process, and it isn't easy. It's frustrating as hell. I equate it to athletics. If you're a golfer, and you can't keep your 3-wood on the fairway, that's what you hit, over and over, making corrections until you get it right. It stinks and it makes you want to break the damn club over your knee and chuck it in the water hazard.

But – and here's the payoff – when you crank out a passage that just sings to you, working on every level from top to bottom, and you get that burst of pride in your chest, you're going to be glad you suffered through this technique.