

And the Winner is...Not You?

by Tammy Schubert

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It's time to submit your manuscript to a contest. Have you prepared yourself to receive anything less than the award? You know your work is terrific, and you are confident it will make the finals. You've selected the perfect dress to wear for the ceremony; all you need is the official word. On the day the finalist notification calls are made, you stare at the phone willing it to ring. At the office, you excuse yourself from meetings to check messages every thirty minutes. Nothing. By the time the sun goes down, it's obvious your name didn't make the list. (But you had your phone lines checked anyway.)

Okay, it stings but you shrug it off and go about your business. But when you open the returned manuscript, you are surprised to see a red pen has leaked all over your baby. Several typed pages of a critique are enclosed pointing out flaws with your heroine and expressing concerns about your missing hero who may have run off with the plot. On the last page, almost a footnote, "Please remember that spell check is only a first line of defense. The program is not set up to know the difference between a rogue knight and a rouge knight." Shocked, the documents fall to the floor with a thud.

If you've ever experienced a moment like this, you know the

sting can be brutal. What you do next is very important. Will you rant and rave about the judge who couldn't see a good story if it hit her in the face? Will you throw your manuscript into a drawer and give up your dream? Or, are you going to accept the advice and grow from the experience?

Rant, rave and weep, if you must, but keep it private or among friends who'll be discrete. Resist the urge to bash the reviewer in public, especially in forums on the web. For those of you not worried about your thighs, eat a gallon of chocolate peanut butter ice cream. Everybody else, go take out your frustration on a treadmill. Grieve, then put it behind you and get to work.

It is important to remember that writing is a business. It takes a lot of time and hard work to turn out a few books every year. Then there are the family obligations, self-care, hobbies and many other things requiring our attention. When a published author uses some of her precious time to judge a contest or do a free read for an aspiring author, accept it graciously and know it is given with good intentions. She wouldn't have read it if she didn't care about helping you. Always remember, the truth might help you get published.

So you don't agree with everything she said; you are under no obligation to take the advice. But don't cheat yourself out of the opportunity to hone your skills. Evaluate everything with an open mind and see what happens. You might be surprised.

Most of these published authors didn't ask for money in exchange for their services. Although many would love to be showered with chocolate and jewelry, it isn't the custom to give elaborate gifts. But a handwritten thank you note goes a long way. One day you will pick up the phone to find an editor who is offering you a contract. While you are celebrating, don't forget the author who gave you the free advice. I'm sure they would love to hear about your success.

Follow your dreams. What are you waiting for? Get to work.