

Juryns motivering:

I en potentiell framtid har kreativt skrivande fått ge vika för jakten på nya idéer. Idéer som kan vara värda miljoner. Med trovärdiga karaktärer och miljöer målar författaren upp en värld som känns både drömsk och verklig. En novell som inte bara handlar om nya och originella idéer, utan också är en.

The Great Writer's Block

The period that started at the exact moment a certain Dorito crisp received more likes than a celebrity called Riley Denner, would become known as 'The Great Writer's Block'. The world was, at first, confused as they tried to draw connections between this major world event and the Dorito crisp record. That was, until they accepted that this coincidence was just a case of utterly weird timing.

Somewhere in this Dorito influenced world, a middle-aged writer with a decent income never stopped writing. It didn't matter that the entire world seemed to have had a sudden lack of new ideas, because he had not lost his inspiration to write. Of course, he never had any new ideas.

The cafe he once came to write in was now the cafe he worked for. He could not help but feel like an architect, cleaning the floors of the building he once built. To this day, he could remember the words written in the email. *Unfortunately, it will be difficult to support our newest writers in these difficult times.*

"Staying late after the shift again?" It was Margo, the barista taking over after him. "If I were you, I'd take that notepad of yours and go to one of those companies." Her voice was friendly. She glanced at the notepad in his pocket, which to the untrained eye could be mistaken for a notepad used to take orders. Ethan smiled back. "I know. But 'Never give up', right?"

Followed by a sigh, she rolled her eyes playfully. "I'll go and get you a nice cup of coffee". She went behind the counter, refilling one of the customers

on the way. It was an inside joke between the two of them, since coffee is the last thing you want after working at a coffee shop for years.

Ethan went to his regular spot by the window, looking out at the empty parking lot. He took out his notepad, which once was full of ideas. As usual, he put on the latest cover of an already worn-out song, scribbling and pitching stories. It was two years since The Great Writer's Block had begun, and Ethan had started leaving his laptop at home. His notepad was far more valuable to him now; the computer was only a mere reminder of what once had been. A world where new ideas were found everywhere in the hands of an artist or in the mind of a scientist. Nowadays, a new idea was rare; those who had one – didn't matter which field – would experience the same instant success as if winning the lottery. Could it be him one day? Thinking about it, he probably had a higher chance of winning the lottery. Though critics agreed; the so-called 'idea makers' were not in fact idea makers – they just discovered ideas no one had documented yet. He continued to scribble in his notebook, looking up once in a while to catch a glance of Margo's concerned eyes. To her, it was perhaps like seeing someone drowning in quicksand – the meaningless motions of movements. As always, he spent the last twenty minutes googling on his phone. Some ideas had already been crossed out, as he recognized them from vague memories of books or movies before the Great Writer's Block. The last three ideas on the list were harder to find online, but Ethan was sure he would find them on the Internet – eventually. Ethan had even heard that in some cultures, there was a religious undertone to it. He scribbled down the usual P. I next to them. P. I, as in Potential Idea. He couldn't stop the regular, almost crippling feeling that his ideas were not original, that they existed already somewhere else in the world.

“Any new ideas?” It was Margo again, smiling. She was holding a wrapped sandwich in her palm, gesturing it towards him. He shrugged his head.

“At least you’ve written something. Practiced those writing muscles, just in case.” In case the writer’s block would be restored one day, Ethan thought. “How many pages?”, she asked.

Ethan wasn’t writing. He was trying to break the system. Three times a week, for an hour and a half, he would brainstorm ideas. Margo thought he was writing, retelling stories from before. She did not know how wrong she was. Ethan, on the other hand, was unaware of how close he was.

“Nine”, Ethan lied. “In case.”

Margo nodded and looked down. It was quiet, just long enough for Ethan to get uncomfortable. He picked up the sandwich, which Margo had put on the table in front of him after he rejected her outstretched hand. “So, a sandwich.” He looked at it, wondering if Jerry or Kent had brought it. “Tell Jerry I appreciate it”, he said, looking up at Margo and waiting for her to respond, confirming it was him. Jerry, their coworker, who sometimes would bring leftovers after a shift at his other workplace.

Margo looked at him. “It’s not Jerry.”

This was new. Usually, Kent would come in person. Perhaps there was a possibility that Kent had not sent it this time. “Sorry, I’m not following.”

“Kent bought it for you.”

“Ah.” Of course he had, Ethan thought. Kent had walked in eighteen months ago in his black business suit, looking at Ethan like a businessman ready to invest. He was an agent for one of the companies who had a staff with the job to find ideas and sell it to the rich upper class in Hollywood. The whole movie industry – as well as all industries, really – eventually more or

less consisted of retellings at this point. Fairytales were more popular than ever.

“You should take it”, Margo said.

Ethan tried to joke, although he knew what she was talking about. “I’m already holding it. Free food always tastes good, you know.”

“You know what I mean. The job.”

The job would be well paid. Besides, he was good at predicting where his ideas would come from – right now he had an Icelandic flow. If there was one good thing with the time they were living in, it was that anyone could come in contact with an idea anywhere. Never original, but still something to hold on to. Sometimes you’d find grains of gold – especially when they were written a long time ago. Old was the new modern, considering copyright rules and the sense of newness it brought.

Ethan stood up, collecting his belongings in a firm grip. “I’ll sleep on it.”

Margo looked at him, nodding slowly. As Ethan reached for his coat, his hand touched hers before he pulled it away.

“Let me know if you say yes to his proposal.” Ethan nodded silently in response.

When Ethan walked out, he could hear Margo and Jerry whispering behind him. “Maybe he will finally let someone help him get out of here”, Margo said.

“Sure hope so.”

Out in the cold night, Ethan wondered if he should register for the night shift on Tuesday. As his hand once again clenched to the thick, leather-bound notepad, he couldn’t help but wonder if it was time to stop. Stop searching

for new ideas. Stop trying to find a new way to retell an already existing story. Stop trying.

Perhaps it was the only way to move forward. He could imagine Margo's face when he told her the news – *tell Kent I'm in* – and Kent, with a wide grin on his face.

After a few hours of rest, he woke up with a headache. He had been circling around the neighborhood with his car, driving in an attempt to clear his mind. With a moan he put on his glasses, looking at the wrinkled sandwich paper on the bedside table. He took it in his palm and straightened it. *13.45, coffee shop. Kent.*

"And they say we only use our phones nowadays", Ethan groaned.

When he told Margo the news, the expression on her face told a different story than the words she uttered. "Oh", she said. "I'm happy for you. When do you start?"

He thought of Kent's words, the determined look on his face. Eager, but also sure Ethan was not the one setting the rules anymore. "If you start right away, we can discuss the salary and perks." The thought of leaving Margo and Jerry had been unsettling; he managed to convince Kent that he could start next Monday instead.

"Will we meet again?" Margo had said that last day, trying (and failing to) casually ask the question.

"Of course", Ethan had answered. How could she even ask such a question?

She didn't look convinced, until he put down his tray and walked closer. "Visit me for lunch."

"Visit?" The faintest of smiles started to spread on her lips. Ethan realized

he liked this, making her happy. Making her smile.

“Next week it is. I’ll make sure to buy you a nice cup of coffee.”

He took out his notepad and flipped the pages. The weekly meeting with Kent wasn’t scheduled until the afternoon.

Potential (new?) ideas

Ethan would always have to ask himself, *What if these ideas aren’t new, but just forgotten?*

Kent would love that. They could sell the unique, good ones and make a fortune. But no matter how much Ethan tried, the ideas were not always related to creative writing.

Today, there were a few ideas regarding how to create an improved rubber duck. Ethan had already sent them off to some toy stores who responded gratefully with a three-hundred dollar gift card to Starducks, which technically was a rival to where Ethan had used to work. With twenty minutes before he had to leave for lunch, Ethan narrowed down the list to three ideas. The first one was about how to make a Big Foot dish, which made him wonder whether the species actually existed. Considering new ideas were never discovered, Ethan feared the answer. The second idea was about a talking squirrel, which (after some digging) Ethan found out was from a comic strip in the seventies. The guys at his new job had already started calling him the animal whisperer, considering the almost embarrassing amount of animal stories lately. Yet, this was not the real thing Ethan was worried about. Even if these ideas had never been written, they might have been discovered by somebody else’s mind. And he would never know.

Then he thought of Kent’s voice saying, “If they are, remember: it’s not

for nothing. It means you'd be a great discoverer.”

The third one was different. Not familiar. It was odd and strange, but in a beautiful way.

“Ready to grab some coffee?”

P.I

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