

## The Brilliant Idea and Its Aftermath

X had plenty of money, and wanted to give some of it away to some deserving person of brilliance. His team of exceptional advisors proposed a contest, the focus of which would be to find the most deserving, based on content and presentation. A team of select geniuses was assembled by force of reputation, and these were to assemble and witness the brainchildren of applicants, then to select from among them the most promising. This was to be done within a certain time frame, to invoke in those who entered both the pressure of competition and the expressed need for continued development within the expansive community where applicants, judges and finally X himself all lived.

Y was a young individual of local renown. In his neighborhood, which was destitute and seated proximal to Constant Misery, Y was honored for his goodness and willingness always to place himself at imminent disposal of those in need of help. He was also quite innovative and often wrote down his ideas, intending future development when he found himself fortunate enough to be given an opportunity. That opportunity came when he saw the flyer proclaiming X's generosity. Y set about immediately to win the contest, because he felt deserving, not only for himself, but for his neighborhood as a whole. They were people who shared great love for one another, and had supported Y faithfully, despite his secretive nature, keeping his notebooks under lock and key, for fear he be discovered a quack, and vilified accordingly. However, as the contest was to be judged anonymously, he saw an entry into possible success and gratification he had never before seen. He quickly downloaded the proposal form from his favorite post at the local library computer lab and, within a week, had completed and entered X's competition.

The applicants totaled 1678, and many were quite deserving, however the weeding out process whittled that down to the best 10. The weeder outers task had been arduous, and the process they used, after eliminating the obviously uninspired, came down to a certain extent to subjectivity – whose thought would be the most productive, the most challenging to explore, the most deserving of X’s blessing, even the most complimentary of X himself, since X after all would provide the gift. The weeder outers decided they were looking for a certain zing, and in 10 they found it. In 512 others who were better than obvious trash, they did not.

Of course Y’s efforts were rewarded with his selection as a finalist. Who would speak of him, after all, if they had not been? Y traveled at X’s expense to the vast public venue where each finalist made their final pitches. He was so excited, he dressed in a costume of his own conception, complete with shiny fabric and a cape. However, during his presentation, he made a slip of the tongue, a slight error, hardly noticeable except by perhaps Y himself. The judges were themselves brilliant, and likely versed in slight errors, but quite possibly the overall zest of Y’s enthusiastic performance could convince them to overlook its minor aspect of human frailty. Y came in seventh and went home with a plaque which he promptly smashed against the wall.

Over the next month or so, Y explored the seven stages of grief. There was a local gun dealership in his community, and every time he passed by, he envisioned himself on a rampage involving X, several of the judges and contestants, even members of his local community who’d inspired Y in his efforts. Then Y turned his thoughts inward, realizing his own shortcomings had led to

failure. He resolved to keep his thoughts permanently under lock and key. He took the strongbox containing them and buried it in the backyard of his rented dwelling. However, he soon found it inconvenient, whenever he had a new inspiration, to run for the shovel to dig up his depository and add to it. Inevitably Y, now fully recovered from his trauma, went back to the life he had known and hoped once more for another opportunity to succeed.

X appeared with the Winner of his contest on many occasions, there to receive his accolades and have photos taken. He wanted Winner always at his right hand, and at the end of a productive day, he dropped Winner off at Winner's home and went away, only to keep in periodic contact for the purpose of renewing the honoring of Winner's win. Winner was the toast of his community for days, and stretching into weeks, and then once in a while, groups of local assembled visionaries complete with media, then only family members, then someone occasionally who still remembered pointed out Winner's accomplishment and the money by which he benefitted. Winner expressed his plans for the money and felt gratified, initiating the process of fleshing out his great idea. He bought this and that and some other things. He pieced them together one way and another. Finally the product became real and X made its distribution a priority. Soon nearly everyone had at least one of the thing Winner's winning entry had made a reality. X was quite pleased with Winner and with himself, and Winner was pleased with both himself and with X's generosity. The thought of marriage was discussed, but quickly abandoned for fear of the perception of collusion prior to Winner's entry, and the inevitable inquiry that might lead to other embarrassments. It was then decided X and Winner would allow their relationship to fade and soon they were both individuals and public figures. People scarcely remembered that Winner had won something at some point. For a short time during this period,

Winner's township was insulated against Constant Misery, however Constant Misery pitched a tent outside the township and waited, for he knew there would come yet another opportunity.

On the advice of his team, X made the contest annual, so he was never outside the company of winners. But even this was unsatisfactory to X, because he felt empty. He envied them somehow at some point. They did not understand him, how deep he was.

One day Winner came across the tent of Constant Misery outside his township. Because he was curious, he looked inside. He wanted to reproduce the way he felt the day he'd won. That feeling became more and more unreachable with every day he hadn't duplicated his victory. Constant Misery greeted him at the entrance to his tent, and said, "You may slay me if you wish." And Winner thought about it and decided he couldn't kill, not even Constant Misery. Instead, he laughed, spontaneously. This day would later be memorialized as a holiday. Children would dress up as Constant Misery, and dress their dogs as Winner and have a day of it. Their families built campfires and watched the flames, and instructed each other how to be safe among their own misdeeds. And when they feasted and gave thanks, they saw the blessings, even in Constant Misery. His tent became the size of a chickpea, and he knew nothing else to do with it but swallow it whole. Inside, it once more began to expand, and so he changed into a whale and felt much hurt having beached himself. The whale became simply aware of its breathing, and every breath became more valuable than the last. That was how Constant Misery began to understand he was X, for despite his inability to swim about, he saw himself in Lilliput until he saw no

more. He felt the cords binding him to the beach. He heard them all communicating, and all speaking about him, so X he was.

Y read in the paper that Z had shot up a grocery store. They showed Z's photo on the evening newscast, and Y recognized him immediately as the man who'd come in 6<sup>th</sup> overall, just one spot ahead of him in the contest. It frightened Y for just a moment. Z was now dead, and had taken the lives of fifteen others, and their photographs were now being shown on the newscast. Members of the victim's families, there were only two of them interviewed, the mother of a child, and the sister of another child. Both lamented, and as Y watched them, he felt somewhat responsible but also helpless. He couldn't imagine how a simple contest could result in such misery. At the same time, he understood how Z had fallen, for Y himself had envisioned himself a hero. But opportunities to be a hero occur only by chance. Y knew Z could not accept his life, ineffectual as it had been. Z had tried to force the world to change, had been in some ridiculous way a champion of his own freedom. And Y again remembered the silly language used to summarize the life of Z, the thing many said to themselves in order to embrace hope: Freedom is never free. Y never understood how anyone could believe a definition of freedom that would negate itself.

X grew bored and relied increasingly on his advisors. The annual contest became complicated and many caveats were added to its rules. After a certain amount of annual winning, the winners and even the contestants who were automatically eliminated because their efforts were obviously substandard couldn't anticipate ever being satisfied. They simply entered the contest

as a kind of ritual explanation of their own anxiety to perform. Eventually, the contest became meaningless. It didn't help X at all, to continually let himself be photographed with winners. The actual meaning of the word sullen became apparent to X at some point. He fired his advisors, who all went on to great careers advising elsewhere. He was tempted every day to give away his entire fortune and simply live as a Trappist monk. He decided to invoke the story of Jesus, and climb a mountain in search of the devil. With every step, X searched to see if the devil might appear from behind a rock or a bush. But the devil didn't think X was worth his time, perhaps, or maybe the devil didn't exist at all. X reached the top of the mountain out of breath. He stood gazing out over the landscape and 360'd. And he thought, "My God! There really is a difference between actually doing this and watching it on tv." For an incredibly brief moment, he understood the world of the contestants who were immediately eliminated. His new advisors told him he could solve the problem by creating the participation trophy, but X himself thought that a bit understated. The following morning, just as he was becoming conscious, X once again thought of giving his entire fortune away. However, he decided to keep it as a form of self-sacrifice. "How could I ever burden someone with this identity crisis?" he told himself.

It occurred to Y the neighborhood needed him and he needed the neighborhood. But when he saw how others had championed things, he realized how strange they were to believe so fervently in nonsense. There were people on the block. He didn't seek to be friends with them. But given the opportunity, when someone dumped a bag of groceries, for instance, he would suddenly be there consoling them for broken eggs, and picking up oranges that had this weird tendency of finding all sorts of places to roll around. Whenever he apologized for the eggs, the

person he was helping would respond, “Well, they’re eggs after all.” Then, without saying it, they’d both think about that spilt milk cliché, whatever that meant.

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