

"The Writing Teacher's Revenge"

By Jay Rehak

"Don't I know you?"

"Yeah, kind of, although we've never met."

"You're the guy who teaches at Whitney Young and writes stories on the side."

"That's right. And you're the guy who hosts a website for creative writing teachers."

"Yeah, that's me."

"Funny, we've never met before. I mean, we're both in the same business and all."

"Yeah, true enough. But, as small as the world is, it's still a big world when the majority of your life is spent in a 25 x 80 foot classroom. Nobody who teaches really gets around much."

"True. It seems like the only time we get a chance to spend time with people in the same business is during the rare teacher conference that we get a chance to attend."

"Yeah, my school never funds those types of opportunities."

"Mine doesn't either."

"I would never have recognized you, except for a picture of you on the web I saw"

"Thanks for recognizing me. I take it as a compliment."

"You should. I don't know a lot of the teachers who submit to my website, except by name, or course."

"I'm flattered."

"I hope you're not upset about not winning the April writing contest on my website."

"Oh, that, well, it does bother me a bit."

"Well, I explicitly stated that the entire story had to be written in dialog and yours wasn't."

"I saw that, but I thought a reference to who was speaking was acceptable. I was thinking in conventional terms, you understand."

"Yes, I understand you were thinking along those lines, but I hope you understand that as a creative writing instructor and a writer, I was trying to give my colleagues a very strict constraint that they had to write to. When I said everything had to be in dialog, I meant everything had to be in dialog. In fact I put the word ENTIRE in upper case letters."

"Now I understand."

"But you're still aggravated?"

"A little bit. I spent a considerable amount of time fashioning the story of the student's revenge. My goal was to write something appropriate for your website, while at the same time, amusing your readers."

"I think you achieved that."

"Thanks. I appreciate you saying that, but I also wanted to win the Borders gift card. As you know, I am a person who doesn't make a whole lot of money for what I do, and it would have been nice to receive compensation for my writing. In the end, I probably would have spent it on my students anyway. But that wasn't the point. I wanted to win. Like everyone, I find winning anything pleasurable."

"But don't you draw satisfaction from having your story published on my website?"

"Yes, I do. But I still felt as though I should have gotten the gift card. It aggravated the heck out of me to see your May posting, where you seemed to suggest that neither of the April entrants had qualified to win the gift certificate."

"Well, in a technical sense, they hadn't."

"I guess I was thinking like a teacher and not like a lawyer."

"Are you suggesting I was thinking like a lawyer?"

"I'm not sure. My understanding is you're a creative writing teacher. On the other hand, you might also be a lawyer."

"I'm not."

"Well, either way, from my point of view, I'd say I should have won the April contest."

"I see."

"There were exactly two entries and each was about revenge."

"But not every line was in quotation marks. Not every line. You do understand that, don't you?"

"Yes, I understand it now. As I said, I was unclear on the constraint as you laid it out in the April Challenge."

"I'm not going to apologize, if that's what you've come for."

"No, I didn't. I came here to drop off my latest story."

"Is it about revenge?"

"I think so."

"Does anyone get hurt?"

"Not physically. It's more about a teacher who feels he has been wronged presenting his case in front of the world."

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

"And is that teacher someone who entered a writing contest only to be told he did not win on a technicality?"

"You're very astute."

"And how does the person who's running the contest come across? Is the person portrayed as mean spirited or someone hung up on minutia?"

"I really can't say. I think you should read the story and decide how the person running the contest is depicted. I tried to write both characters as even-handedly as possible. My thinking is your readers will decide if the teacher got jobbed or not. Perhaps the person who ran the writing contest will come off as very reasonable and the writer will come across as unreasonable."

"Then how would that be revenge?"

"Well, if the writer comes across as petty and a sore loser, the story would have an ironic twist to it. The person seeking the revenge, you see, would suffer from the attempt."

"Yes, yes. I know what irony is."

"On the other hand, if the person who is running the contest comes across as the victimizer, the revenge for the writer would be somewhat sweet."

"How's that?"

"Well, for one thing, the person who wrote the contest would be posting a story which allows the writer to extract revenge on him. In effect, the victim would be an instrument of the writer completing his revenge."

"But what's the revenge in all of it?"

"The writer would have had the world hear his side of the story, and, if in fact the audience felt he had been victimized, the person running the contest might feel compelled to award the writer the Borders Card he had rightfully earned the previous month."

"Perhaps the person running the contest won't post the story, or will take it down immediately after it has been posted. What then?"

"There's always next month."