



Getting Published: What No One Tells You

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PUBLICATION DAY. THERE IS NOTHING like it in the world. A knock at the door; the postman, delivering the cardboard box that contains your precious newborn work. You open it with trembling hands and hold the book up to the light.

There it is, your name on the front cover in big bold letters, announcing to the world that *you* wrote this. Breathlessly, you open the book and see the words that you laboured over, the phrases and sentences that you sweated blood to deliver. It looks different; the layout and font are different from the draft you worked on. It all seems strange, new, *wonderful*.

Sometimes, if you are lucky, the excitement lasts for a week or two. You might have a launch event. Friends send congratulatory messages. Reviews appear, and if perhaps they are not *quite* as positive as you hoped for – they rarely are – at least they are reviews, and will generate sales. And then, it all goes quiet. Your editor has moved on to other projects. You are left in darkness, reduced to checking your Amazon rankings in the faint hopes that this will tell you whether the book is selling, or if it is selling *at all*.

That post-publication silence is one of the things no one tells you about when you become a writer. After the exhilaration of publication, it can be *profoundly* depressing, and the longer it lasts the deeper the depression can become. Generally, editors only call you if there is good news. If you reach a significant sales milestone, for example, they will share this with



you. So, if they don't call, that could mean nothing is happening. Left alone with no one to talk to and no idea about what is going on, your imagination begins to work overtime. The book, the work you cared about so passionately, is dying on its feet. No one is reading it. It is a *flop*. Your career is over.

Of course, good editors don't allow this to happen, and one of the other things no one tells you is how important it is to build a strong relationship with your editor. But even when you manage to do so, there is no guarantee that relationship will last. Editors tend to vanish just when you need them most. They move to other jobs; or they get ill and go on long-term leave; or they retire. All these things have happened to me, and in every case a project which had been flourishing immediately ground to a halt.

The worst case was when the editor who had signed me up for a series of books moved to another department, and her replacement made little effort to disguise the fact that she didn't want to publish the books. We went from 'These are absolutely fabulous and we know they're going to sell really well!' to 'Why in God's name did we buy this tripe?' in the space of about a week. I dropped to the bottom of my new editor's list of priorities. The books were published, and actually sold pretty well, but it was quite clear that my time with that publisher is over.

Relationships are an important part of life, and nowhere is this more true than in publishing. With a good relationship with the right editor, you will prosper. They really should start teaching that in creative writing classes.