



## Getting Published — What No one Tells You

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**T**HE WRITER'S LIFE IS A SERIES of peaks and troughs, but no peak is perhaps higher or harder to climb than the first one — getting published. That first moment of affirmation, when after many rejections or silences a publisher finally says *Yes* must be celebrated to the full for it is unlikely ever to be equalled.

Even if you know quite well that most books sink without trace, and most writers do not make enough to live on, you will not yet have internalised this truth. In your heart you know that you are different and special. Optimism, that due reward will follow effort, is as yet undimmed.

No one tells you that having once been published is no guarantee that you will be again. Indeed, if your first book is commercially unsuccessful it may even be harder to sell your second than it was to find a publisher in the first place. Debuts tend to have a publicity momentum of their own – you may after all be the next big thing – but this is a card you can only play once.

No one tells you that the commissioning editor who fell in love with your book and offered you a two-book deal and who was such a champion of your writing will be headhunted or fired before your second is even delivered. It will be inherited by one of their junior colleagues, who is more interested in curating their own list than in picking up someone else's leftovers. Halfway through the editing process they will leave too.



No one tells you that having pored over every page of your proofs with fanatical attentiveness, the first thing you will see on opening a finished copy of your book, at random, is a particularly hideous typo.

No one tells you that you will never again be able to enter a bookshop purely for the innocent pleasure of browsing. Your eye will always be drawn to the space where your book ought to be, if only they stocked it. And if by chance you do spot a substantial pile of your books, you will not rejoice, but assume that they are still there because no one is buying them. Nothing will please you.

No one tells you that the shelf life of a hardback is barely longer than that of a yoghurt. Space on those coveted tables at the front of bookshops is limited and boxes of new arrivals will turn up every week to claim them. Within a couple of months one copy of your book will be banished to the alphabetical section in the remotest reaches of the shop and the rest returned to the warehouse unsold.

No one tells you that the generous and complimentary reviews in the literary pages will pass unnoticed by your friends and relatives, but the one snarky, condescending remark will somehow be seen by everyone you know and their commiserations will haunt you for decades.

No one tells you that the reason remainder copies are so cheap is because they are immemorably unsaleable, no matter how many events you plan to do and how cheaply you plan to sell them. They will take up valuable space in your loft and move with you from house to house and when you die your children will have to pay for a skip to dispose of them.

And if, having been told all these things, you still feel that the greatest moment in the life of a book – finishing it – is reward enough, then you are a writer, my friend, and there is no helping you.