



## Rejection

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**R**EJECTION STRIKES FEAR into the heart. It's a javelin with a tip of ice. It's a terrible thing that comes whistling in the wind in the form of a letter or email. Either way, and no matter how many softening, encouraging phrases are used, the word that jumps out is *No*.

*No, no, no.*

It's well known that if ten people say *Yes* to your work it's the *No* that will come to haunt you every night like a hungry ghost. The poem isn't good enough. The story falls short. You have not written the right words in the right order: you have created a cacophony that no one wants to hear.

Once, after receiving the news that a novel had been rejected, I slumped off my seat onto the floor, crawled under the table and wept. I was working in a university at the time and sharing an office. Thankfully my colleague didn't come in and find me communing with the carpet.

On another occasion, a poetry journal that I really wanted to be published in, rejected my third offering of poems. At first I was crushed. Then the poetry warrior rose up in me and I decided that I would send poems to this journal for the rest of my life if I had to — until I either wore them down or they finally found one they could accept. It took twelve attempts before I was successful — at which point I was almost disappointed as I'd come to enjoy the ridiculous challenge.



Sometimes, in retrospect, I'm relieved that a piece of work hasn't been accepted. It wasn't ready. It needed more editing. Other times, I've rewritten the rejected item a thousand times but this has rarely led to success.

If there's one thing I could tell my younger self, it's that work isn't always rejected because it isn't good enough. Having edited a journal, I know that sometimes a piece of work simply doesn't fit the particular issue I'm working on.

Etymology of rejection is important here: rejection means thrown back. You send something out and it's thrown back. Over the years I've come to see that it's good to be generous enough to understand that rejection of a piece of work isn't the same as rejection of me as a writer.

So if a poem boomerangs, if a story sets off into the world and then comes back without having found somewhere to live, I welcome them home and wait for a while before sending them out again. In this way, perhaps, I reject the rejection and keep the work in the great whirl of words that are looking for somewhere to roost.