



Rejection

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YOU MIGHT SAY THIS is a story of rejection in reverse.

When I started work on my first novel, I didn't have a plan and knew nothing about the publishing process. I just wanted to write a book. Two years later, when I thought I'd written all I could, I started researching agents. And that's when I struck lucky: I had only received a couple of rejections when I heard about an open submission competition being run by a new imprint. Any unpublished writer could submit. So I did.

A few weeks later, I got a call to say they were buying my book. I didn't even know what that really meant. But ten months later, my debut was published in hardback and I had been invited to appear at the Edinburgh Festival. 'Simples', as a well-known puppet meerkat would say.

I had a feeling that this weird, easy-peasy period wouldn't last, and I knew I needed an agent to help me plan a writing career, so again I set about finding one. I sent letters and had meetings, and spent a couple of hours with one who I realised, then and there, was definitely the agent for me. The vibe was all so positive — until three weeks later, when she emailed me to tell me that she didn't feel the same. I was crushed.

A few months later, my publisher took my second novel, but things at the imprint were changing; my editor had left, and I was uneasy. The second novel came out in paperback only, and promptly disappeared. Six months further down the line, the same publisher did not like my third novel,



despite having agreed to my outline and given me a deadline for it. It was becoming apparent that they were unlikely to like any of my future ideas, either. Via a short telephone call, we agreed to go our separate ways. I still had no agent.

I took a creative writing MA, so at least I would know what publishers were talking about, and began writing my fourth novel. I am still writing it. I got a part-time job so that I could afford to live and write and then, feeling like a failure, made myself start working on short stories and flash fiction. My reward was some positive feedback. I felt more positive. I won a few bits and bobs, and got a short story published here and there.

I began sending my fourth novel to agents. Silences and rejections came, and worse — ghosting; an agent requested the full manuscript and I got over-excited, held my breath for three months, paused work on the manuscript while I waited to hear back. And waited. And waited. Seasons came and went. I decided the manuscript must be rubbish and didn't look at it for a year.

Then last summer, 2020, I took a printout of it on holiday with me. In a campervan near Beachy Head, I decided it was good, and worthy of another edit.

I am now sending it out again and waiting for more rejections. I will keep going because I know it is the book I wanted to write. Its publication, if it ever happens, will probably earn me nothing, but I'll have done what I set out to do.

All writers face rejection at some point, or maybe many points, and it is never easy. But it's up to us to choose how we handle it.