



Getting Published: What No-One Tells You

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LIKE SO MANY WRITERS, I'd had dreams of publication long before it happened. I'd imagine holding an uncorrected proof or seeing my work in a window; for years, in bookshops, I'd approach their shelves and slide my hand deep amongst the other books by *F*s – Fleming, Fitzgerald, Fforde – as if to check there was room for one, just one, book by me. *One day*, I'd think — *if I'm lucky*.

It seemed a golden, unattainable dream — so I never really imagined the challenges that publication might present. They exist, I know that now — although I stress that they're challenges I am entirely blessed to have (there is no grumble here). I never appreciated how vulnerable one might feel, having one's words out there: I hadn't prepared for the nerves, the awkwardness of self-promotion, the need for a thick skin with each review. These things hadn't necessarily occurred to me — yet nor was I surprised by them, when they came. They made sense. Publication is a business — and they are part of the job.

There is, however, one part of being published that I was entirely stunned by, that I did not expect and which is, perhaps, the greatest of its challenges: that is, sorrow. Publication is wonderful — both euphoric and humbling, and I've been dazed by it each time. But in the days and weeks that follow a book's release, I feel a strange sadness. It drifts in and settles. With my first book, I thought I was simply tired — and I'm sure that played its part. But it was more than that. It felt like grief; I felt bereft, as if something had physically left me, that I looked for but couldn't find. I



slept more; I needed solitude; I spoke far less. The fact is that, seven books later – after each of which I felt the same – I understand this experience far better: it feels like grief because it *is*. In short, I miss the characters. Two or three years of living with these people – of thinking about them in supermarket queues or in the bathtub, of wondering about their shoe size, their heartache and childhood fears, their regrets and allergies and the sound of their laughter, of what they keep in their bedside drawer; two or three years of trying one’s best to take care of them – and one starts to love them. It can’t be helped. One starts to enjoy (mostly) having them around. And then, with publication, they’re gone. They stop being yours and belong, instead, to the reader, which is entirely as it should be. But even so, for a time, these fictional people leave a space behind them. No-one ever told me to expect these grieving days. But I do expect them now, each time — and I don’t mind them; it is a sorrow that’s entirely worth it, a small price to pay for a published life. Those days are my last farewell to dear, old friends as they turn the corner, out of sight.