



## Rejection

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**R**EJECTION, EVERYONE TELLS YOU, is part of the writing life. I found my first agent with surprisingly little effort. Someone recommended him to me – a big name with an intimidating reputation – and he liked the few stories I had written at the time. Overwhelmed by the attention, I told him I was writing a novel – which was not really true – and meanwhile he sent my stories to a few editors and a number were published in journals and magazines.

Years passed and I did not write the novel. During this time my contact with the agent became more sporadic and – from my point of view – more fraught. I had anxiety dreams about him. Sometimes he didn't reply to my emails. On one occasion when I went into see him and mentioned a particular writer that I had not read, he threw one of their books at me across the office in disgust. On another occasion when I arrived at his office for an appointment he was not there. I tried not to take any of this too seriously. He was well known for his eccentric behaviour. And anyway, I hadn't written the novel I promised.

Eventually, I had enough for a collection of stories and – reluctantly, it seemed – he agreed to send it out to publishers. The collection was picked up and published but it didn't change our relationship. He was no more responsive to my occasional phone calls and emails. I was shortlisted for a big short-story prize but he didn't reply to the organisers' invitation to the ceremony. Later, I asked him if the shortlisting would help me publish another book. 'Maybe if you'd won,' he told me. The anxiety dreams continued.



Several years later, and I *had* finally written the novel I had promised. I sent it to my agent and a few weeks later, my phone rang. He had only called me once or twice before and I sensed it was bad news. ‘There are too many problems with the book,’ he told me. ‘I won’t be able to sell it.’ I struggled to take it in. It felt like breaking up with a partner. Are we over, then, I said, or words to that effect. ‘If you write something else,’ he said, ‘I’d be happy to read it.’ We were over.

A year or so later I had a new agent and she sold it to the first editor she sent it to. From time to time I see my old agent at literary events. He must know that my book was published and as we pass each other I think about stopping him and asking — does he think he made a mistake? Does he think the editor who published it made a mistake? But instead I nod at him, and he nods at me, and we both walk on.