

## First Impressions and Second Chances

By Karen Finnigan

Sending out queries to agents. Feeling the pressure of perfection. Perfect spelling, perfect punctuation, perfect ink, perfect characters, perfect pacing, perfect opening line. . . .

Me, coming at the publishing world with something new and different. Something I hope will make a different impression from my earlier publications. Over me hangs the sheer weight of that old saying—You never get a second chance to make a first impression! That adage magnifies in meaning. Will I get a second chance in a tight market? Am I good enough to outshine the competition?

Here's what submitting queries leads to: It's perfection creeping into how I view the world. It's echoes of my job as a technical editor, when I came home too sapped in my left brain to make the right brain function. Now I'm free to write, but will this submission process freeze my creativity? Steal my creativity? I find myself stalling at writing. Instead I'm vacuuming the dog hair under the sofa. Polishing sinks. Organizing the linen closet. Correcting commas. Replacing ink cartridges. Moving the split infinitive in a verb. Proofreading the query backwards. Reprinting it over one measly comma.

Then, after each trip to the post office or after hitting the Send button, I have to morph from perfectionist back to creator. From Jekyll to Hyde. I have to allow misspelled words and wrong grammar and backwards commas to splash onto my blank page. I have to (get to) allow myself the imperfect and crazy and off the wall, or I'd never create any first drafts. In fact, I allow myself umpteen drafts because I'm never impressed with my own work. Yet I want an agent to be impressed. Attempting to publish

should come with hazard signs. Warning! Creating novels and polishing query letters at the same time can give you whiplash.

I believe in redemption, in humanity. In the mismatch between body language and character. In the beauty of simplicity, but the complexity behind a single smile or frown. I believe that waffling and flip-flopping aren't sins, that we are allowed to reconsider and change our minds. I believe in the underdog, the springing back from the corner and living to fight another round. In empathy for the little guy, the downtrodden. In the potential of the path not taken. In the power of tulips, cosmetic surgery and red pens. I believe in growth, in resilience, and in hope. Most of all I believe in never giving up.

Never giving up, come to think of it, applies to both the perfection of query letters and the soul-stirring ride that is creativity. That's the one-size-fits-all adage to hang over my desk.