

"This deeply-felt, original novel..."

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My twin 13-year-old step-granddaughters were just here with their mom overnight because they had to get an early-morning flight out of Boston for a spring-break trip to Florida.

"Do you have something we can read on the plane?" they asked.

I glanced around. I knew they didn't want the new Chang-Rae Lee novel (and anyway, I haven't finished it) or the Collected Stories of Carol Shields.

"How about one of these?" one twin asked, pointing to a stack on a shelf in a dark corner.

Oooof.p (Or, as the twins would write: OMG).p *The stack*. The dread stack. The neglected, dust-collecting, unread, unacknowledged, guilt-producing stack.

Of what? Of not-yet published novels sent to me by editors who want a blurb.

Years ago...MANY years ago—you can count how many when I tell you the title—publisher Arthur Levine sent me a galley of "The Golden Compass." I read it and was dazzled.p I said so in my reply to Arthur. He printed what I had said, on the cover of the book....with my permission, of course.

I wish I hadn't. The book would have become a classic, a best-seller, a multi-award winner, a movie, and a play without my blurb.

But it seemed almost as if, once my name was on that blurb, it made me fair game as a Potential Blurbist. Manuscripts and galley proofs started arriving by the dozens. Being a conventional female product of the 50s, I tried diligently to read them all, to reply politely to all of them, to say nice things. It couldn't be done.

So I started saying no: politely, of course. I started explaining that it is meaningless to have my name attached to a few words of praise if my worshipful sentences are being quoted on a dozen or more books each season. Potential buyers/readers would hoot with derision when they picked up a book and saw, once again, "This masterful first novel..." or "I couldn't put this down..." over my name. "Oh, her again," readers would sneer.

But how, then, would I choose which ones to blurb? Easy. NONE. That was my decision. I made one exception in the ensuing years, for reasons too complicated to explain here. (And I don't think the book achieved any greater sales because of it).

It meant, sadly, that I had to say no to friends and acquaintances, sometimes, though they were all understanding. And quite recently I said no to a book about to be published in translation, a book I think (from its description) I will very much like....but what good is taking a stand if you then deviate from it and make exceptions?

But still they come. In *hordes*. Hence the stack. Reminded of its existence by my granddaughters, I realized that I had not even replied to the letters of entreaty, had not opened the ARCs, had not read a word of any of those books, not even jostled the stack, but simply let it sit there and grow taller and taller. I was plunged slightly and briefly into guilt.

But life is short. I am old. My various guilt pangs are fewer and of shorter duration than they once were.

I looked at the twins and looked at the stack. Then I said, "Help yourself." And they did, gleefully.

Farewell, stack. You are being read. But not, alas, by me.

Tags: Untagged