Emily Dickinson Hated Submitting

Emily Dickinson hated submitting. It was demeaning, ill fitting. She wrote for herself and felt no need for her work to be judged by others. But. By her sixties she had many poems sitting unknown on her shelves and now believed people should read them. She had to get her work published. Yet Emily Dickinson hated submitting–it was demeaning, ill fitting.

Most publishers want a manuscript sent only to them, then you wait three months or longer for a response. She divided her work into thirty-nine submissions to individual publishers, each containing different poems. After a year, the response: twelve publishers folded and the others sent vague rejection emails. She never knew how many of her poems were even read. Emily Dickinson hated submitting–it was demeaning, ill fitting.

Self-publishing was her sole solution. She printed and distributed herself an anthology of her poetry. Then, in a stroke of unbelievable luck, she broke both her legs falling down the stairs of a bookstore. The local TV station's feature on the recluse author with the broken legs went viral. Sales of her poetry soared because of the feel-good story, then word of mouth took over. Millions of copies were sold. Her legs healed and she felt fulfilled.

That was when unpublished writers sent her their work, asking for advice and help. The more famous she became, the more unsolicited manuscripts. It took a year to get to a manuscript in "the slush pile." She rarely read more than the first page, then sent a standard note that said thank you but she was only a writer.

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