

Dear Ms. Rooney:

Because of my less-than-terrific experience with my first agent, I am cautious about signing with another. I have spoken with perhaps a half-dozen agents since then, and none of them were suitable, either for reasons of personal preference or for business reasons. I'm going to add you to that list for both reasons.

XXXXX is an excellent editor, and one whose opinion I value very highly. I've known him for several years, and I take his recommendations seriously. When he suggested I contact you, I wasted no time. When you responded, I immediately began to wonder how serious you were about your job. Some of the things that caused me pause, early on, were these: your response was too prompt, if there can in fact be such a thing; a half-hour hardly seemed time enough for you to have read the story I attached, and to have adequately considered my query. Your comments about NIGHTBLINDNESS were overly enthusiastic, based on such a short summary. Finally, you conduct business in Michigan, which is light-years from the center(s) of activity in the literary field -- and while I appreciate that living in New York or L.A. isn't a requirement, it seems common enough that Michigan struck me as a disadvantageous choice.

But like I said, I trust XXXXX's opinion, and I sent the novel to you right away. You responded to me within a day of receiving the novel -- again, that seemed too fast. And it seemed unusual that you'd be willing to offer me a contract without so much as holding a phone conversation with me first. Your comments on my 73,000-word novel came down to two generic sentences: "Nightblindness" is a sensational novel. Ray is such a memorable character.

Pardon me, but I have to call bullshit.

When I received your 'contract' I was bothered even further by your presentation. A contract pasted into an email? A contract that doesn't deal with issues of how I'm to be paid if the novel sells? So I asked XXXXX how much he knew about you, and he said you'd discovered him and asked if he would refer his clients to you, that you were just getting started in the business and trying to build your client list. At the same time that I sent you my inquiry about your client list, and experience, and AAR membership and so forth, I queried Victoria Strauss, who runs the Writer Beware web site for the Science Fiction Writers Association, for any information she might have about you and your agency. (Ms. Strauss has compiled some terrific data over the years on questionable agents/publishers/editors/etc. and makes the information available to writers who can use it.)

Ms. Strauss replied, and I learned several interesting things -- her email was quite long, but the gist of it came down to this (my words, not hers):

You have no business being in this business, and you should be ashamed of yourself for taking advantage of writers -- of anybody! -- in this way.

In case you feel like I'm being unfair, let me share with you some of the gems from Ms. Strauss's email:

"Ms. Rooney appears to be in operation under several different names: Michele Rooney Literary Agency, Simply Nonfiction Literary Agency, and Creative Literary Agency (though I think that one may be defunct)."

"I've gotten a number of complaints over the years that Ms. Rooney charges upfront administrative or marketing fees, and bills monthly for submission expenses. Upfront marketing fees are nonstandard: successful agents typically let these costs accrue and deduct them from a writer's advance. Ditto for ongoing

billings. According to the most recent reports I've received (for Simply Nonfiction), she asks for \$100-150 upfront, with monthly expenses of anywhere between \$40 and \$50."

"Claiming to have worked for "publishing companies and literary agencies" is meaningless unless you say which ones. Beware of agents who provide vague credentials of this sort--a good agent will be specific. Also, Ms. Rooney may well be an accomplished journalist, but journalism and selling book manuscripts to publishers have nothing in common, and skill in one doesn't fit you for doing the other."

And the most telling of all:

"I first began getting reports about Ms. Rooney in 2000. From then till now, I'm not aware that she has ever sold a book to a commercial publisher."

Ms. Strauss has a copy of the contract that you sent to me (according to her, it's the same contract you use for Simply Nonfiction; she has that contract on file as well) and provided me with a wonderful analysis of everything that's wrong with it. In the interest of preventing you from using that information to modify your contract to be less suspicious to savvy writers, I'm not going to share those comments, though I wish I could. They're very enlightening.

I did quite a bit of research then that I should have done prior to wasting my time querying you, and I've discovered your name, along with the names of your agencies, splattered all over the web in red ink. Writers' newsgroups and forums, agent web sites, a few personal web sites -- you've developed quite a reputation for spamming the web with solicitations for authors, and as an "agent" of ill repute. Possibly the only reason that I didn't conduct this research to begin with is that I trust XXXXX's opinion very much. Rest assured that XXXXX now has all of the information that I have, and that he won't be sending any more of his clients or friends your way.

You have been blatantly dishonest to me, you have dodged important questions as though they weren't asked (AAR? Proof of sales? Proof of experience with agencies/publishing houses? -- all questions asked, all questions ignored), you have provided a shaky client list of authors who either don't exist or have published only with vanity presses; I could go on. I don't think that I need to.

I am not exactly pissed-off; after all, this isn't the first time that someone has attempted to take advantage of me, and I've taken enough hits that I think I've developed enough of a sense of caution to avoid taking many more. But I'm appalled at the way you're conducting business, duping writers into thinking that they might actually have found a passionate advocate for their work, when apparently you're doing next to nothing for them, and only taking their money. I would like to ask you why you are behaving so unscrupulously, and why you would choose to deceive for a living. I presume you're an adult with a conscience. I'm quite sure you won't answer this email, but if you do answer, then I would like an answer to just that question: Why?

No matter what the answer is, you should be ashamed of yourself.

Jason Gurley

P.S. In case this isn't clear, I'm declining your offer of representation.