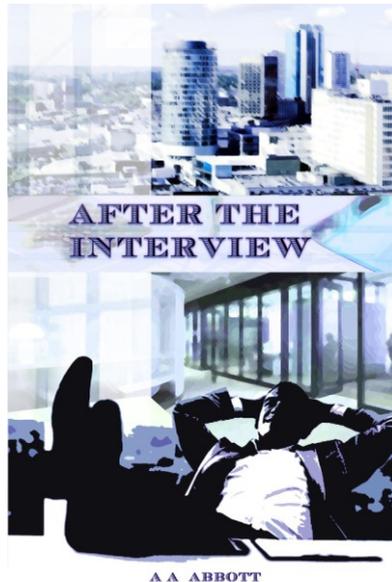


AFTER THE INTERVIEW

by A.A. Abbott

1st 3 chapters free for you to
enjoy



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A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

We've all made mistakes at job interviews, but what happens when the tables are turned? Andrew, rejected for his dream job, finally takes his revenge.

Jed's passions are computers, music and trains. He tries to understand the world around him, but his inability to deal with people means he risks losing everything he holds dear.

Boris admires a beautiful American girl. He can't predict the consequences will be fatal...

*I love to write about life at the office - with added thrills. Have fun reading the first three chapters of **After The Interview!***

A.A. Abbott

Chapter 1 Boris: a big decision

“I’ve got a question for you,” Melissa said, her brown eyes wide with excitement.

Boris thought she looked more beautiful than ever before. Nevertheless, he felt sick to the pit of his stomach. “Go on,” he said, surrendering to the inevitable.

Every 29th February, he had been on edge, expecting her to ask. He should be grateful that she had waited this long. They had lived together for over twelve years. Now, he felt he could actually hear the ticking of Melissa’s body clock; a bomb about to explode, shattering the sweet life they shared.

It had been fun, a continuation of his student days but with considerably more money. On graduating, he had found work with undemanding hours and reasonable pay, had bought in Greenwich at the right time and had plenty of credit to fund an active London social life. Melissa had seemed happy to move in. All she appeared to want, at least until now, was simply to be supported in pursuing her passion for music.

“Will you marry me?”

“Yes darling, of course.” He smiled, hoping to hide his dread. However awful the notion of settling for a semi with garden and children, the thought of losing Melissa forever was even worse. He was certain she would leave if he turned her down. At least she was not pregnant yet.

He rose to his feet and bent to lift Melissa to hers, intending to hug her. It caused a minor consternation in the restaurant. Waiters dashed to their side, asking if everything

was all right. He wondered if they thought he intended to leave without paying.

Melissa soon resolved any such misconceptions. “Everything’s perfect.” She was glowing. “We just got engaged.”

Then champagne would be on the house, they were told.

Melissa had booked an early table, and they left the restaurant in New Change shortly before nine o’clock. The waiters had a little difficulty finding Boris’ overcoat – everyone in London seemed to wear a thick black wool coat in the middle of winter – but that was soon resolved.

“Just look for the smallest one,” Melissa suggested.

Boris reddened.

“All the best things come in small packages,” she whispered to him.

A few shops had late opening hours, their brightly lit windows dotted here and there among mostly shuttered premises. The jeweller that Melissa favoured was not one of the late openers. Melissa took Boris’ hand and guided him to the window, made of strengthened glass no doubt, where the ring of her choice sat on a bed of black velvet.

“There. That’s the one I want,” she pointed.

Even in the dim glow of streetlamps, the diamond ring glittered. It was easily the largest stone on display, with a price tag to match.

It would upset her if he complained. Anyway, half a bottle of champagne had improved Boris’ mood. He smiled.

“We’ll get it tomorrow, darling. Come along to the office at lunchtime, and we’ll go to the shop together. We need to make sure it’s the right size, don’t we? Or we could go to Hatton Garden if you like.”

“Hatton Garden? Is this one too expensive?”

“No, of course not. You can have any ring from any shop, anywhere. Just say the word and it will be yours.”

He would buy it with his credit card, then find a better paying job. He could start by putting out feelers at his squash club, where nearly every member was a rich accountant or lawyer. Boris knew he was underpaid, but had remained in his current role for several years due to inertia and a degree of idleness. There were few places in the City where he would be allowed to work nine to five. He could easily double his salary by job hopping, then repay his credit card balance and afford a mortgage in the suburb of Melissa’s choice. The bill for the wedding was another matter. Perhaps Melissa’s father would dip his hand in his pocket, but Boris doubted it.

They strolled arm in arm to Bank, to take the Docklands Light Railway back to Greenwich. The reception area of their apartment complex was being manned by the late shift when they arrived. “Guess what? We’re going to be married,” Melissa told the man on the desk.

“Congratulations Miss Stevens, Mr Brooks,” he said.

He was an Eastern European, a little older than Boris, and much taller, dark haired, ruddy and coarse-featured. A Pole or Slovak or some such. Boris had seen him before but could not recall his name. He peered at the man’s badge. Szymon, that was it. No wonder it had slipped his mind. He had no idea how to say it, even.

Boris was sure the man was staring at Melissa's cleavage, and not for the first time. "Good night," he said stiffly, giving Szymon a filthy look, before putting an arm around Melissa's shoulders and heading to the lifts.

"Asshole. Shorty." Boris was sure he heard Szymon cursing. He turned round sharply.

"I beg your pardon. What did you say?"

"It's icy, surely?" said Szymon. He appeared to be suppressing a smirk. "I am sorry it was not clear. My English is not so good."

"Your English is fine, Szymon," said Melissa in an encouraging tone. She pronounced it as 'shy men'. "I wish I could speak Polish half as well."

Szymon flashed a grin at her.

Boris shook his head. She either had not heard Szymon swear, or had chosen to support the man's lie for some unfathomable reason.

"Remember who you're talking to, Szymon," he said.

"Of course he wasn't calling you names. You mustn't be so sensitive about your height," Melissa said, when they were relaxing again in their penthouse overlooking the Thames. "Chin chin!" She had left another bottle of fizz in the fridge, and was pouring two glasses.

"You were confident I'd say yes, then?" Boris teased.

"I would have drowned my sorrows otherwise."

Her eyes suggested she would have packed a suitcase too. Nevertheless, his spirits lightened. He gulped the champagne, not caring if he went to work with a hangover the

next morning, or even declared it a duvet day. His employers would soon be part of his history, along with, regrettably, his single status.

Chapter 2 Jed faces facts

Jed Gardner had not asked for coffee. The chief executive officer of GardNet did not need to. As if by magic, it always appeared exactly when he wanted it.

“An espresso for you, Jed, and lattes for your visitors,” Valerie said.

Mark and Raj thanked her fulsomely. Jed said nothing. He gulped the espresso and returned the empty cup to his PA’s tray, still in her hand as she waited. She took it away, shutting his office door behind her.

Jed remained silent.

“I expect you’re wondering why we’re both here?” Mark asked.

Jed nodded. He could not recall a joint deputation from both his chief financial officer and sales director before.

“Raj just had a sales meeting with our biggest client, Whitesmith Insurance,” Mark said.

Jed drummed his fingers on his desk impatiently. He knew Whitesmith was their biggest client. Mark was always the same; he spent far too long waffling. He should stick to numbers and leave words to the sales director.

“I’d better tell you what they said.” Raj was sweating. “They don’t like our Indian call centre. They want to end our contract.”

Jed had been expecting, indeed even hoping for, a technical question. There was nothing he loved more than

solving a difficult IT problem. “They can’t do that,” he raged, making no attempt to hide his dismay. “Since I set up GardNet, I’ve insisted on huge penalty clauses for all our customers if they terminate early. Whitesmith will have to pay us millions. Billions if I have anything to do with it. I’ll see them in court.”

“They can do it, and they’d win a legal case, because their contract only has a one month break clause,” Mark said. “As you know, they were one of our first clients. In actual fact, our bargaining power was very weak at that time. For Whitesmith, we had to agree to terms and conditions we wouldn’t accept today.”

“We do stand a chance of retaining them as a client,” Raj interrupted. “I persuaded them to give us two months to set up a call centre for them in the UK.”

“That’s impossible,” Jed said flatly. “Are you complete idiots? We can’t recruit and train an IT helpdesk in the UK in two months, especially with the Christmas holiday period about to start.”

“Raj has got a good deal for us in the circumstances,” Mark said. “Jed, this contract is worth £20m a year in profits. This way, we get to keep it. It would be a very sorry Christmas indeed if we had to tell our shareholders we’d flushed all that down the toilet. No bonus, and very probably the boot for both of us. They’d be looking for a new CEO and CFO.”

Jed nodded. He was obliged to acknowledge Mark was right. They both owned shares in the company – they had set it up, after all – but they had sold a controlling interest to private equity investors in order to fund expansion. The

majority shareholders had been hands off, so far. Why change a winning team? Losers were a different matter.

“I don’t know what Whitesmith are so upset about, though,” Jed said. “We don’t hold their data in India; we have servers right here in London, in Docklands, for that. Our banking clients insisted on it. The Indian guys are just there to answer the dumb IT questions that our clients can’t seem to resist asking. For example, how do you switch the PC on?”

Raj and Mark exchanged knowing glances.

“It really does get as basic as that,” Jed protested. “I fielded those questions every hour in the bad old days when I manned the IT helpline in Birmingham, Mark. Do you remember, when we first met? I ask you! Our geeks could be sitting on the end of a phone in another galaxy and it wouldn’t make any difference.”

“It’s not simply a matter of data management,” Raj said. “Whitesmith staff don’t have any confidence in our Indian colleagues. They don’t like their accents, they feel it takes too long to receive advice, and half the time it’s wrong.”

“That’s shocking if it’s true,” Jed said. “I want that call centre manager over here on the next plane.”

Raj looked uncomfortable. “I’m not convinced it is an accurate description of our service, by any means,” he admitted. “But the customer is king. I’m merely telling you what Whitesmith is saying to me. As it happens, Whitesmith’s chairman has political ambitions. I think that’s the real driver behind this. They’re keen to demonstrate to their customers that they’re buying British, so they want a call centre in the UK.”

“They’ve also given you a very specific shopping list of the service levels they want, haven’t they?” Mark said.

“Yes. 100% of phone calls must be answered within 30 seconds, with 95% of queries resolved within five minutes.”

“That’ll cost a fortune,” Jed complained.

“Actually, they’re receptive to paying more,” Raj said. “I believe they’d cover our extra costs. One last thing I didn’t mention, though. They want Geordie accents. Apparently, they’re perceived as more trustworthy.”

“If anyone understands them,” Mark murmured.

“I might as well write my resignation letter now,” Jed ranted. “We can’t simply recruit extra people at the datacentre in Docklands, or even try to find the guys we let go in Birmingham five years ago when we offshored the call handling to India. We have to recruit people in Newcastle, who may know nothing about IT, and we have two months maximum to hire and train them.”

“There’s another solution,” Mark said. “Madrigal has a call centre in South Shields, and it wants to sell it.”

“South Shields? Where’s that?”

“It’s a town near Newcastle,” Mark said. “The local accent is almost the same, close enough for Whitesmith to find it acceptable. The staff are highly trained and award winning. And their wages are much lower than they would be in London. Frankly, it’s an unemployment blackspot and you can pay people what you like.”

“Why is Madrigal selling?”

“Madrigal develops hardware and software solutions. They’re exiting the IT support business, except for first line technical support for their own products. I suspect they can’t make money out of the call centre now the focus of that market has moved offshore to India. Ironic, as Whitesmith want us to onshore again.”

“OK,” Jed said. “Let’s talk to Madrigal. Raj – you’ll lead the negotiations.”

Mark caught Jed’s eye. “Please,” Jed said.

“The negotiations are commercially sensitive and we should keep them secret,” Mark said. “We need a project name.”

“Project Shield,” Jed suggested.

“One last point,” Mark said. “Failure is not an option. We have to buy the call centre from Madrigal. I don’t know how much it will cost: £30m? £40m? As your CFO, I could be considered derelict in my duties if we didn’t structure this deal tax-efficiently. I think we need to recruit a whizzkid tax planner, and I’ve found one. He’s my squash partner, actually: Boris Brooks. Do you want to meet him before he starts next week?”

“No,” Jed said. “Meeting another beancounter is the last thing I need. It’s your job, and his, to ensure we pay as little tax as possible. I don’t care how you do it. Am I clear?”

“I don’t blame you, Jed,” Raj said. “We’ve got too many finance managers already. With all the reports they want, there’s barely time to run the business.”

“Thanks for your support,” Mark fired back.

Jed had almost lost patience. They might be joking with each other, he supposed. It was too exhausting to analyse their behaviour to determine if that was the case. “Stop your bickering, and concentrate on the Madrigal deal,” he warned them.

Chapter 3 Andrew's deal

The last of the autumn leaves had finally fallen, forming a golden carpet around St Paul's Church. Andrew Aycliffe hurried back from his lunch appointment in central Birmingham, suspecting from the quickening wind and leaden sky that snow was on its way.

Ruby was waiting in his office, already sitting at his meeting table.

"Make yourself at home," he told her cheerfully, hanging up his coat and scarf. "Would you like a coffee?"

"I've brought some," she replied, gesturing to two cups on the table.

"Ah, thou good and faithful servant," Andrew said, sitting opposite her. "Give me the latest on the call centre, then."

"It's looking promising," Ruby said. "I sent briefing packs yesterday to five targets, all of them likely prospects to buy the division. I've had two expressions of interest so far, both in the £23m to £27m range."

"It's worth more than that," Andrew said. "OK, the call centre isn't part of our core business, and I'd like to sell it so I can return cash to Madrigal's shareholders - but I'm not giving it away."

"Understood," Ruby said.

"I knew you would," Andrew said. He was pleased at the way Ruby was developing as a negotiator. Unlike most sales managers, she was interested in profitability as well as

sales targets. "If we can't raise £30m for the South Shields division, we're better off keeping it," he explained.

"I think more bidders will emerge," Ruby said. "That could be one right now." Her smartphone, set to silent mode and placed next to her coffee, was starting to vibrate.

"Why don't you take it?" Andrew suggested. He waited as she spoke to the caller, sensing from her ready smile and animated voice that it was good news. "Well?" he demanded as soon as the call had ended.

"That was Raj Patel," Ruby said. "He was talking high twenties. I bet he'd go above £30m." She blushed. "He's a pleasant fellow to do business with, too. Very personable."

Andrew grinned. "Are you telling me you fancy him?" he teased her.

"No." Ruby laughed. "Never mix business with pleasure."

"Would you make me an offer otherwise?" he said, tongue in cheek.

"Sorry, beards don't do it for me."

Andrew fingered the offending hair on his chin. "Too bad," he said, amused. An awkward thought was beginning to nag him. He stopped smiling. "Ruby, doesn't Raj Patel work for GardNet?"

"That's right," Ruby said.

"Don't speak to him. I won't sell to that bunch."

"Why not?" Ruby was clearly mystified.

“Why not, indeed?” Andrew considered whether to proffer an explanation. He decided she deserved one. “It’s personal, Ruby. Jed Gardner nearly destroyed my career before it began.”

“But,” Ruby objected, “Raj is the highest bidder so far.”

Andrew would not relent. “By all means include him in your negotiations, but only to push the price up so someone else pays more. I’m not selling the call centre to Jed Gardner’s company. End of story.”

THANK YOU!

Thank you for reading the first three chapters of **After The Interview** - I hope you enjoyed it! Of course, Andrew may say it’s the end of the story, but life-changing events are about to happen. As the tale picks up pace, Boris, Jed and Andrew experience infidelity, fraud and murder...Grab a copy of the book to find out more!

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