

LERNSTMÖKER

Carole Eilertson

A Taste of Notting Hill



Frauenroman



Langenscheidt

New Beginnings

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It's Friday afternoon, and to be perfectly honest, I don't like the way this job interview is going.

I **squirm** uneasily on my chair and try to focus on the guy sitting behind the chrome-and-glass desk in front of me. Directly behind him, crystalline winter light pours through the window and fills his **stark** office with a harsh winter light. The only speck of colour in this monochromatic cube of a room is on the desk in front of me: a bunch of bright yellow, overripe bananas covered in a **rash** of fine brown spots, **nestling** in a **cut-glass** fruit bowl.

The man **putting** me **through** my **paces** is Giles Withers. He's looking for a "management assistant" to "liaise with corporate clients", to "create **tailor-made advertising pitches**" and to "do some **out-of-the-box thinking!**"... That's what it said in the advert, at least. My application is spread out before him like a Spanish fan. I can see my name – Rose Shakespeare – **emblazoned** on the top of each sheet. He **prods** my CV suspiciously, as if it could be con-

to squirm [skwɜ:m] sich winden **stark** [stɑ:k] schlicht **rash** [ræʃ] Ausschlag **to nestle in sth.** [ˌnesl 'ɪn] in etw. eingebettet sein **cut-glass** ['kʌtɡlɑ:s] geschliffenes Glas **to put sb. through their paces** [ˌpʊt / θru: ðə 'peɪsɪz] jdn. auf Herz und Nieren prüfen **to liaise with sb.** [lɪ'eɪz wɪð] eine Verbindung zu jdm. aufbauen **tailor-made** ['teɪləmeɪd] maßgeschneidert **advertising pitch** ['ædvətəɪzɪŋ ˌpɪtʃ] Werbepresentation **out-of-the-box thinking** [aʊtəfðə'bɒks ˌθɪŋkɪŋ] unkonventionelles, kreatives Denken **emblazoned** [ɪm'bleɪznd] hervorgehoben **to prod sth.** [prɒd] mit dem Finger auf etw. zeigen **CV: curriculum vitae (Lat.)** [kəˌrɪkjʊləm 'vi:tai] Lebenslauf

taminated with **anthrax**. He looks up suddenly; his steel-grey eyes focus on an area dangerously close to my cleavage.

I'm starting to feel decidedly **on edge**.

"I'm sorry, Giles. Could you repeat that? I got distracted there for a minute."

I call him Giles because once, five years ago – in my former life – just before my daughter was born, Giles and I both used to work for the same employer, Blythe Sackville-Smythe – an ogre of a woman who owns a trendy and very reputable London advertising agency called "Add-Up Solutions". Before going our separate ways, we used to be relative equals in skill, status and ambition. Then Giles got onto the fast track, making a name for himself by developing superbly ridiculous but **sublimely** successful dog-food commercials for a wealthy pet food manufacturer. He left Sackville-Smythe, bought an expensive sports car (Jaguar 3MX), set up his own agency and, presumably, has been enjoying a long string of successful campaigns ever since.

As for me, I gave birth to my wonderful daughter Saffron, and then things started to **go belly-up**. First I lost track of Saffron's father (*unfortunate!*), then I put on ten pounds (*careless!*), subsequently I got kicked out of my job (*not my fault!*) and finally I grew used to being a full-time, single mother (*exhausting!*).

So much for equality of the sexes!

At least I eventually got rid of the ten pounds!

Now, five years later, I'm sitting here as an unemployed single mother practically begging my former colleague to hire me. God, surely there is nothing more humiliating

anthrax ['ænθræks] Milzbrand **on edge** [ɒn 'edʒ] nervös **sublimely** [sə'blɪmlɪ] unglaublich **to go belly-up** [gəʊ ˌbelɪ'ʌp] baden gehen

than applying to someone who you once taught how to switch on the office coffee maker.

Giles strokes my CV with his index finger and smiles at me **cherubically**. “Rose, as I was saying, your CV is very impressive, even though there isn’t much hard data from the last three years ...” He **smooths down** the edges of the **crisp**, expensive, water-marked paper (it cost me a fortune at an exclusive stationery shop in Bond Street). Giles leans forward towards me, a **swath** of wavy hair falling **indolently** over his forehead.

I remember how, in my former life, we used to enjoy the occasional office flirt. At the time, however, I had a steady boyfriend (who later turned out to be the most unsteady man I’ve ever met), so I was technically unavailable.

Leaning back once more in his leather **swivel chair**, Giles tears his eyes away from my smart, silken Coco-Chanel “job-interview blouse”, and squints at me critically. His fingers are now doing a tap-dance on my precious CV, **riding roughshod** over the section entitled “professional qualifications and experience.”

Exercise 1: Are the following statements true or false? Mark the correct sentences.

1. Giles Withers runs an advertising agency.
2. Rose Shakespeare has never met him before.
3. Rose, an advertising executive, has been unemployed for several years.

cherubically [tʃəˈruːbɪklɪ] engelhaft **to smooth down sth.**

[ˌsmuːðˈdaʊn] etw. glätten **crisp** [krɪsp] fest **swath** [swɒθ] hier:

Strähne **indolently** [ˈɪndələntlɪ] träge **swivel chair** [ˈswɪvəl tʃeə]

Drehstuhl **to ride roughshod over sth.** [ˌraɪd ˈrʌfʃɒd ˌəʊvə] rücksichtslos über etw. hinweggehen

4. Giles is unimpressed with Rose's CV.
5. Giles has wavy hair and grey eyes.
6. Rose and Giles both used to work for Blythe Sackville-Smythe.
7. Blythe owns a publishing house.
8. Rose is a widow.

“Ro-ose.”

He **enunciates** my name carefully and, as he does so, flicks his tongue out from between his lips only to **retract** it **deftly**. It looks as if he has tasted an exotic fruit that looks sweet on the outside but is bitter at its core.

“My one concern is how you will be able to handle the child-care situation. You say ... your daughter hasn't started school yet. You know yourself how hard the advertising profession is. Long hours; total commitment; 24/7; tight deadlines – doing the impossible right now. Thinking out-of-the box ... I don't know if ...” He hesitates, squeezing a smile out onto his thin lips and swivelling **jerkily** on his chair. “I'm not absolutely convinced that a single mother with a daughter below school age is capable of making such a huge commitment.” He plucks a banana out of the bowl, peels it and starts **munching**. “Don't get me wrong,” he says between bites. “I don't doubt your professional qualifications, and I know you're talented. For God's sake the two of us worked side by side for Blythe for at least a year ...”

to enunciate [ɪ'nʌnsi:ɪt] aussprechen **to retract** [rɪ'trækt] zurückziehen **deftly** ['deftli] geschickt **24/7: 24 hours per day/7 days per week** [ˌtwentɪfʊː'sevn] rund um die Uhr **jerkily** ['dʒɜ:kɪli] ruckartig **to munch** [mʌntʃ] mampfen

“Nine months,” I say, feeling my cheeks burn hot.

“Sorry?” Giles looks perplexed. He drops the banana peel into a shiny stainless steel designer receptacle.

“Nine months. That’s how long we worked side by side for Blythe.”

“Whatever!” Giles shrugs his shoulders indifferently. “But to get back to the point, what do you intend to do with Sharon? Bring her to work with you?”

He watches me closely, an amused grin spreading over his face. I clench my legs together tightly. “*Saffron is down* for a private school. She’ll get full-time **tuition**, and there are after-school activities.”

Giles’ features relax. He leans forward in his chair, his grey eyes **roaming** over my face.

Damn, this guy is still really attractive. Slightly Italian-looking, his teeth, even and white, contrast pleasantly with his smooth olive skin.

“So you’ve got a place for ... what’s her name? ... Saffron! Why didn’t you tell me this before?”

My thighs stick to the leather upholstery. As I shift my weight about uneasily in the chair, they make a sound like popcorn popping.

Ah well, I suppose honesty is the best policy. I try to speak confidently. “Well, I haven’t exactly received a firm okay, as such ...” My voice rises an octave. “I’m pretty sure, however, that it is more or less a ...”

Desperately I search for a suitable ending for the sentence. In actual fact, I have no idea if The Fulton Academy will offer Saffron a place. The Admissions Officer was ex-

to be down for sth. [bi: 'daʊn fə] bei etw. angemeldet sein **tuition** [tjʊ'ɪʃn] Unterricht **to roam** [rəʊm] schweifen