

NEVER MIND THE BOTOX

Media coverage

Index

FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS

Accountancy Age

Financial News

London Accountant

Accountancy

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Law Society Gazette

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Rachael Singh interviews self-published author and former Deloitte partner Penny Avis on her novel "Nevermind the Botox Rachel".

You can read an extract from the book [here](#).

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Book extract: Never Mind the Botox

by Accountancy Age Staff
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HITTING BUSINESS WIFE PLEASURE

Never Mind The Botox



An extract from *Never Mind the Botox*, the story of a corporate accountant working on the sale of a 'glamorous cosmetic company'.

"CAN I HELP YOU?" the receptionist said, tossing her hair slightly as she spoke. Her smile looked slightly lopsided and Rachel suddenly had an overwhelming urge to leap across the desk and peer at her face for signs of surgery. She resisted.

"Yes, thank you. I'm Rachel Altman from Payne Stanley, here to see the [finance](#) director, Tom Duffy. He should be expecting me."

"Take a seat. I'll let him know you're here."

"I'm just waiting for two colleagues," said Rachel. "They should be here in a few minutes. I'm slightly early."

She sat down and looked around. If the reception was anything to go by, the offices were going to be lovely. The surfaces were adorned with opulent flower arrangements and the decor was deep red with heavily textured wallpaper. The seats in the waiting area were a mix of finely upholstered chairs and soft leather sofas. Small boxes of leaflets advertising various miracle treatments sat on the coffee table, next to a neat pile of beauty magazines. Rachel sat and flicked through one, listening to the quiet hiss of the air conditioning while she waited for the other two to arrive.

AJ arrived first, shortly followed by Rosa. By the time they'd all signed in, Tom Duffy had arrived in reception. He walked over to them and looked at each of them in turn. Rachel could see that he wasn't quite sure which of them was in charge, so she quickly stepped forward and held out her hand.

"Hello, Rachel Altman, very nice to meet you, Tom. Can I introduce my team: Alistair James, but everyone calls him AJ, and this is Rosa Castell."

"Good," said Tom. "It will be interesting to see how much they might be prepared to pay for us," he added, staring up at the ceiling as he spoke.

He didn't quite rub his hands but Rachel could tell he was imagining the prospect of a large wad of cash coming his way. She'd seen this before, in other [businesses](#) they'd worked with. Management teams had often started out very positive about selling, only to be disappointed by the offer that followed. She hoped that this business was as good as they thought it was. It would make a nice change to be able to deliver good news.

Rachel spent the rest of the day finding her way about, organising their project room and briefing Rosa and AJ.

"Don't forget we need to be professional at all times," said Rachel. "This is no different to any other business that makes [money](#) out of providing a service."

"Quite right," said AJ, laughing. "No different at all. Apart from the fact that we're not in a factory and there are still pictures of tits everywhere."

"They're hardly the same as girly calendars, AJ," said Rosa. "They're just adverts for boob jobs."

"I think you'll find the expression you're looking for is breast augmentation," said Rachel. "And it's what they do, so it's hardly surprising that they're advertising them. We're going to have to get used to talking about this sort of thing and using all the proper expressions as it won't be that long until we're standing up presenting about it."

"I think it's hilarious," said AJ. "I have no idea how I'm going to talk to the doctors about what they do with a straight face."

"You wait until you have to meet the doctors who do penis enlargements," said Rachel. "That will take the smile off your face."

Never Mind the Botox, by Penny Avis and Joanna Berry, is published by Matador at £6.99. For more information go to [avisberry.com](#)

Watch our interview with co-author and former Deloitte partner Penny Avis [here](#)

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FINANCIAL NEWS

Tuesday, 21 February 2012

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Life after the City: Penny Avis

Vivek Ahuja

17 Jan 2012

Former Deloitte partner Penny Avis is hoping to emulate the success of *Sex and the City* with a series of fiction books about the lives of professional women in the modern world



Life after the City: Penny Avis

Life after the City: Penny Avis

Then: corporate finance partner, Deloitte
Now: co-author of City-based fiction series *Never Mind the Botox*

"When I decided to take a career break and left Deloitte, little did I know that I would end up using my experience of the City to write a fiction series about the lives of four professional women

working on a high-profile M&A deal, but it has been an amazing journey that has had Joanna [Berry, co-author] and I crying with laughter at times.

"I was approaching 10 years as a partner at Deloitte and really enjoying my work, most of which focused on helping multinational corporate to grow, when the Lehman Brothers crisis erupted, financing dried up and corporate finance workflow just stopped.

"I'd been juggling two young children with my career, and with things quiet on the work front, I opted in summer 2009 to take an indefinite break, which took a certain amount of faith as it was a gamble, with no guarantee the firm will have work for me if I want to go back.

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"I'd been juggling two young children with my career, and with things quiet on the work front, I opted in summer 2009 to take an indefinite break, which took a certain amount of faith as it was a gamble, with no guarantee the firm will have work for me if I want to go back.

"While I had harboured a belief in the back of my mind that I could do something other than accounting and I knew I did not want to grow old having never tried, I had never had the time to pin down exactly what the something else might be.

"The idea of writing a book about being a woman in the City struck me while talking to Joanna, and it was something she had long wanted to do as well, so we started exchanging ideas and that's where it all began.

Between the two of us, we decided to write a series of four books – we saw that woman-focused television programmes such as *Sex and the City* and *Mistresses* had proved extremely successful, partly because different women identify with each of the main characters, helping to maximise the programme's appeal.

The books tell the stories of four professional women connected by their involvement in the impending sale of a high-profile cosmetic surgery business, and reveals how they cope with the challenges they face and the impact the deal has on their personal lives.

We knew there was a gap in the market for a realistic fiction book about women in the City, and hopefully the books not only hold appeal as fiction but also show people outside the City that such careers are not always glamorous and trouble-free.

"The first book, *Alex*, received great reviews, and the second, *Rachel*, has just been published. It tells the tale of an accountant working on the deal who unearths an embezzling scandal at the cosmetics clinic and then discovers it involves her boss's secret mistress, leaving her facing a dilemma.

"Two books into the series, one of the most surprising things so far – perhaps because as two City women we are used to having good advice on hand – has been the number of decisions that Joanna and I have had to make for ourselves on how best to do things, given we had no prior experience of the publishing industry.

With hindsight, though, that has helped us enormously and I probably couldn't bear being less involved now.

"I am still involved with Deloitte, as a freelance mentor for a small number of partner-track directors and I certainly don't feel ready to totally detach myself from the mother ship just yet.



BOOK PREVIEW by Philip Smith

NEVER MIND THE BOTOX: RACHEL

Penny Avis and Joanna Berry (Matador)
Paperback published on 16 January 2012, £6.99

Rachel Altman is a work hard, play hard kind of girl, constantly led astray by her lazy bar-diving sports-hack boyfriend. When, in her job as a corporate accountant, Rachel is offered an exciting new project, working on the international sale of a glamorous cosmetic surgery company, she can't believe her luck.

A few days into the project Rachel discovers that a doctor and nurse team at the clinic have not only secretly been treating celebrities, 'off the record,' but they have also been embezzling funds from their high profile clients.

Rachel's story is the second episode of a four-part book series, *Never Mind The Botox*, written by Penny Avis and Joanna Berry. The series chronicles the stories of four professional women who are all working on the

sale of a high profile cosmetic surgery business. Each book sets out to reveal how each woman copes with one of the most glamorous but challenging deals of their careers.

Works of fiction, maybe, but how much is based on personal experience and inside knowledge? Joanna Berry is a qualified solicitor, having worked with the Spice Girls and Channel Five. Co-author Penny Avis, who lives in London, is currently on a career break from her job as a corporate finance partner at Deloitte.

Penny's career highlights include working on the acquisition of Body Shop by L'Oreal, being named one of the UK's top 10 accountants under 35 and ultimately being appointed to Deloitte's UK board.

Currently under development for a TV series, *Never Mind the Botox* could be the start of a trend where the accountancy and legal worlds really do become sexy.



RESTAURANT REVIEW by Derek Nash

BRIGADE

Brigade, The Fire Station, 139 Tooley Street, London SE1 2HZ, tel: 0844 346 1225, www.thebrigade.co.uk

Brigade is a relative newcomer to the burgeoning business district between London and Tower Bridges known as More London. Housed in a listed former fire station – hence its name – it is a bar and bistro with a difference. Its chef founder has a vision to help disadvantaged people through a charity that offers apprenticeships in his kitchen, where they are mentored with a view to securing jobs in the catering industry.

Diners have a chance to see this in action because the cooking area is totally open to view, and when we visited on a Friday lunchtime the atmosphere was buzzy with conversation and laced with the tempting smell of herbs and spices wafting from the 'live' kitchen.

The food is an eclectic mix of English dishes such as partridge, New Forest mushrooms, Cornish mackerel salad, wild rabbit terrine, mutton pie and pork belly with some imaginative accompaniments,

alongside sharing plates and some unusual offerings such as lobster baguette. Prices on the à la carte menu (a fixed price lunch option would be welcome in these cost conscious times) average around £7 for starters and £9 to £20 for main courses. The excellent homemade bread is well worth ordering, although take note, it is very filling and might leave you with little room for one of the many tasty deserts.

The wine list is quite small but has decent bottles from around £18 and a number of fine wines – perhaps more suited to the expense account. Worth consulting the very affable and well-informed wine waiter, a winemaker from Italy in a previous life. And if it's just a drink you fancy, there is a bar area and a terrace for when the sun shines.



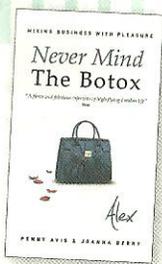
Derek Nash is deputy head of media relations at PwC

STAND AND DELIVER

You might have thought installing a convenient cash machine at work would be an easy win, but it proves a total nightmare for Finance Mole.

BOTOX BOON

This is a good example of how working for a Big Four firm helps a literary career. Penny Avis, until 2009 a high flying corporate finance partner at Deloitte, has co-written, with Joanna Berry of law firm Eversheds, a 'chick lit' novel called *Never Mind The Botox*, about the world of cosmetic surgery. It features a corporate financier called Rachel Altman, who is involved in the sale of a cosmetic surgery business called the Beau Street Group. Rave reviews include: 'With their own business experience, the authors have created a top read.' It is the first of a four-part series and there are plans for a TV show. www.avisberry.com/news.html



GETTING YOUR GOAT

Scottish Borders firm Stark Main & Co has come up with an interesting initiative involving goats. It has linked up with a 'global giving initiative' called Buy1Give1 (B1G1) that allows the firm to provide services to people in poorer countries.

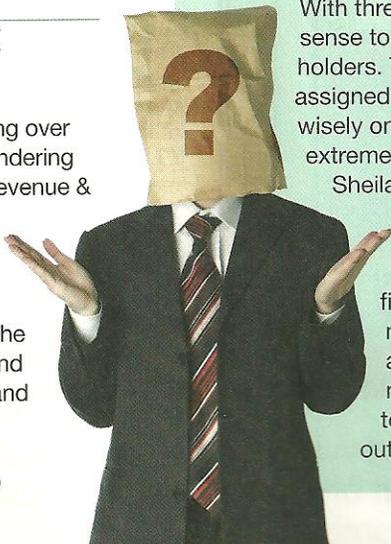


Stark Main director, Ian Main, explains: 'As just one example, now when we produce a set of accounts for a new client, we automatically give a goat to a needy family in Kenya through B1G1 and the World Youth International Project.'

Well, you would, wouldn't you?

LAUNDERERS TO THE QUEEN, NO LESS

The Queen could be presiding over 'one of the largest money laundering operations in history' – at HM Revenue & Customs. QC Jonathan Fisher says there are fears that HMRC systems have been penetrated by criminal organisations for money laundering purposes. He described the recent agreement between the UK and Switzerland as 'a grubby little deal' and noted that further tax amnesties planned presented a 'colossal opportunity' for money launderers to legitimise the proceeds of crime.



It's the innocuous suggestions that cause the most problems. Getting money out on a wet day was a pain, so the Mole was all in favour of installing an office cash machine. The reality of doing so was surprisingly difficult. A man came, looked round the office, frowned and declared we needed a floor-mounted device. It turned out the landlords wouldn't let us install a floor-mounted device as the concrete structure of the building was apparently not suitable for drilling into, although seemingly suitable for walking on. Such information would have been useful had the floor-mounted device not already been delivered and left like a beached whale in the canteen.

PIN HEADS

After several months we finally received a specially weighted, free-standing device. Filling it up was a two man job, requiring a pin holder and a key holder. With three keys it made sense to have three pin holders. The treasurer had assigned a key to himself, wisely one to the Mole and extremely foolishly one to Sheila from Accounts Payable. That left only three pin holders, yet five potential staff members to assign the pin number too. I tried to make handing it out an informal,

random process, but immediately it became clear that the two left out were offended.

For the sake of flexibility, I decided to have five pin holders, against the will of Sheila.

With machine, keys and pin holders in place all we needed was money. The first delivery was scheduled for 4pm, when the canteen was quiet. It arrived at 1pm when the canteen was packed. It's difficult to be dignified when trying to work out how to release Tray One on hands and knees while annoying other staff by blocking access to the microwave.

THE WRONG SORT OF MONEY

Prior to ordering the money there had been extensive debate about how much we needed. As it turned out it doesn't really matter if the machine takes tens and 20s and the delivery man turns up with fives. Especially if the delivery man has left before you realise you have £10,000 worth of £5 notes that won't go in the machine.

If nothing else, the cash machine provided endless conversation with the treasurer where previously I had struggled. He has taken to continually checking how much money is left and what the 'burn rate', as Sheila calls it, will be. All this came before the much-debated purchase of a note counting machine. Exciting times!

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A NOVEL IDEA

Meet Penny Avis – the high-flying ex-corporate finance partner who, having smashed glass ceilings and weathered corporate storms is now embarking on a writing career

Ex-Deloitte corporate-finance partner-turned-author Penny Avis is already making plans for her 50th birthday, even though she is only 43. ‘I’ll either be making a speech saying: “I gave up the best job in the world that I worked so hard for to write a book that nobody read,” or it’ll all pay off and be a bestseller. Who knows? Either way it’s been fun.’

But what makes someone at the height of their professional career, who has seemingly smashed through any glass ceilings quicker than neutrinos in the Large Hadron Collider, give it all up to write a novel? The clues are in Avis’s determination in the world of corporate finance and how she has successfully managed her career with being a mother of two.

Avis’s career is even more surprising given that she didn’t have an early vocation for accountancy, instead reading law at Sheffield University.

‘I couldn’t decide what I wanted to be and when I spoke to careers people they said to do a good degree. I thought I wanted to be a management consultant but I didn’t know what that was.’

Luckily, an innate numerical streak meant that at the university milk rounds Avis’s head was turned by Price Waterhouse and she applied to train with the then Big Six firm, moving to its Manchester office.

‘I got my ACA qualification and became an audit manager. What you get from audit is the ability to look at new businesses all the time and learn what’s good and what’s bad about them; the ability to walk into a business and say, look, I can

understand why this business is doing well, or not so well, and where it sits in its competitive environment by looking at the bigger picture.’

Having graduated in 1989, by 1994 Avis had decided to move to London, a decision driven by friends and the desire to have a change of scene. The only secondment available at the time was in the technical department answering a hotline on accounting queries. ‘I wasn’t renowned for my deep technical expertise, but it was available immediately.’

‘WORKING ON A TECHNICAL HOTLINE GAVE ME UTTER CONFIDENCE IN THE FIELD. IT TAUGHT ME THE ROUTE TO FINDING THE ANSWER’

The job involved giving ‘the ultimate view’ on any queries from teams and partners in the UK who were after technical sign off.

‘I had to be interviewed and crammed about standards that were coming out. Amazingly enough I got the job.’ It was, she says, ‘the best thing I ever did, for two reasons. Firstly, it gave me utter confidence in the field. I knew that they could throw anything at me and I knew how to get the answer. It taught me the route to finding the answer.’

The second benefit was that it was the perfect springboard for what turned out to be the rest of Avis’s career in professional services.

‘Another job came up, in transaction services, and the candidate had to be available immediately. I’d just done a stint for four weeks to help with a crisis in transaction services. Although they

were only taking 10 people, they liked my technical background plus the work I’d done on the project, so I got one of the 10 jobs in the fledgling transaction services in 1993, when I was 25.’

The move took her career in a new direction and led to her going through the transaction services director panel while pregnant with her first daughter, Charlie, in 2000.

Simple decision

It’s at this point that many women in the City face a sometimes difficult

decision: when, and how, to pick up, continue or advance their career post children. For Avis, it was surprisingly simple: ‘I never thought I might give up,’ she says. ‘I took three-and-a-half months off and went back full time.’

Avis appreciates that she was in a financial position to afford the help that made this possible. ‘I had a maternity nurse when Charlie was first born, then recruited a full-time nanny a month before I went back to work so there was a proper handover.’

She did suffer first-day guilt, though not perhaps for the expected reason. ‘I got in, briefcase down and someone said: “You’re back, can you come to this meeting?” So I was straight back in there with no time to think, and when I got home I thought: “Oh God, I’m the worst mother, I didn’t even ring!”’ From then on, she arranged that the nanny would send regular texts – ‘my fix’ – so

XX

that she knew what was happening at home.

While Avis's advice for women in the workplace isn't that they should pretend to be men, she admits that super-sensitive HR departments might erroneously read that message into it.

'My philosophy is that you should be a swan at work, however hard anything else is. Sometimes people think I'm saying women shouldn't be who they are but I'm not, I simply believe they should think carefully about how much of their home life they should bring into the office.

'I think it's a matter of giving the impression that sometimes you're a little bit more in control than you are. Don't go in sobbing when you're in the middle of a crisis.'

Avis's own role model is her mother who has always worked. And with a childhood that at one stage involved five sisters in one household, she hasn't been short of watching women work and interact.

She currently mentors partner-track women at Deloitte on a pilot scheme, with two-hour sessions helping them prepare personally and professionally.

* READ ALL ABOUT IT

***Never Mind the Botox* is a series about four professional women all working on the sale of a high profile cosmetic surgery business. Each book reveals how the women cope with one of the most glamorous but challenging deals of their careers, and the dramatic impact it has on their personal lives.**

Alex Fisher is a high-flying lawyer close to making partner and busy planning her perfect wedding to Elliott. In the latest book, just published, Rachel Altman is a corporate financier with a prestigious accounting firm who's desperately trying to keep on the straight and narrow. Hopelessly led astray by her bar-diving boyfriend, she gets the chance to turn things round when her boss gives her the break she's been waiting for.

'Rachel is closest to my career,' admits Avis, 'though the stories in it are made up. Our risk management brains worked out that it would not be great to have clients ringing up having recognised themselves!'

Cosmetic surgeon Stella Webb and senior banker Meredith Romaine are the main characters in the final two books, both to be published later this year.

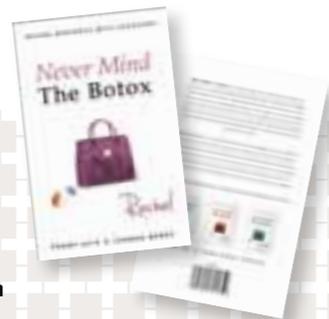
Visit www.avisberry.com for more information.

Avis credits her friendship network and 'a husband who completely supports me' as being crucial to her own success. She was also a founding member of the City Women's Club, a network of senior women working in financial services. 'I do think networks – formal or informal – are incredibly important,' she says.

And while her hard work gave her the financial stability to fund comprehensive childcare, Avis is quick to point out that 'if you're going to work at your career you have to invest in it and it will get easier. We didn't have loads of money; I was a director and so with that first nanny, [finances were] almost neutral, but I knew I had to do it to get partnership.'

With her sights set on being a partner, Avis faced another crossroads when Price Waterhouse and Coopers merged. 'I was going through partner promotion but I felt I was going to be partner 26 of 26 and have a tiny role.'

She ended up undergoing the partner process at competitor Arthur Andersen at the same time and, when



the firm offered her a meaty role plus partner, she jumped at the chance. She was, she says, 'very proud of myself'. It was March 2001.

Little did Avis know that just a year later she would be forced to vote for her survival after the Enron scandal, which brought down Andersen and rocked the accountancy world.

'Baptism of fire'

'My abiding memory of the Enron crisis is calamity, shock, how the place falls apart, when the US freeze money and you can't pay payroll and bizarre messages from South American partners. I had some of the hardest meetings of my career; it was a baptism of fire for a new partner.'

She was offered a job at Ernst & Young. 'I didn't feel I had any loyalties anywhere but we were encouraged to stay with the marching army.' So she held on to wait and see what deal was being made behind the scenes.

In the end, the deal was announced in the less-than-glamorous location of a hotel near Heathrow airport, although the cloak-and-dagger nature of it, plus the doubtless bordering on hysterical Andersen partners, made for an exciting afternoon.

'We had messages from our partners who were flying down with Deloitte partners, so we knew it was Deloitte [taking over]. Once the deal was presented to the 350-odd Andersen partners, we had to go to the back of the room and vote in favour or not of the rescue transaction.

'There were 350 partners and 240 places in the deal. What we voted on was the process to agree who those 240 partners should be, not the names, so at the time you didn't know whether you were a turkey voting for Christmas or not.'

As practically last in, Avis assumed she'd be offered a directorship, but her interview notes with Andersen – 'the only paperwork they had on me!' – were so good that she walked in, as partner, to an enlarged transaction services department.



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The culture difference between Andersen and Deloitte was, says Avis, immediately obvious. 'Andersen partners were more outspoken and entrepreneurial – perhaps Deloitte would say more dangerous – while

The idea for a book came while she was driving and musing about what enterprise she could set up easily. A chat with Joanna Berry – friend, mother, lawyer and ex-Eversheds partner – clarified things.

'If I was advising someone with my business hat on I'd tell them not to do it, but if you self-publish you own the copyright,' says Avis.

'We decided to do everything to retail standard plus a little bit more. We hired our own PR, got independent cover designers to pitch, used a freelance editor and set up a professional website.'

Perhaps going back to her audit training, Avis was already looking at the bigger picture. 'We knew the real success was film or TV and we could see what other books had made the move, like *Bridget Jones* or *The Devil wears Prada*.' Having written a proposal, Avis and Berry toured the trade shows and caught the attention of Future Films, signing a deal in 2011.

It may be that Avis is on her way to become the new Helen Fielding or Candice Bushnell, but it seems that although you can take the girl out of accountancy...

'I'll always see myself as a corporate finance partner at Deloitte,' she laughs, 'I resigned, I have no legal right to even say it, but I can't not say it!'

Beth Holmes, journalist

'THE WORK JUST STOPPED. I'D BEEN BUSY FOR FIVE YEARS AND IT WAS A HORRID ENVIRONMENT. I STARTED THINKING I WOULD TAKE A SABBATICAL'

Deloitte was incredibly well run and very risk-focused.'

Avis went on to have a second child, Cole, in 2003, again taking short maternity leave and going back full time, and her star continued in its ascendancy – with highlights including becoming lead client service partner for Unilever and joining the Deloitte board.

But things changed after the Lehman Brothers collapse in 2008. 'The work just stopped,' she recalls. 'I'd been busy for five years and it was a horrid environment, ringing around for work. I started thinking I would take a sabbatical. I thought, if I don't take a break now, when the market is rubbish, I'll be doing this when I'm 50.' So in 2009 Avis resigned from Deloitte.

'We started texting ideas and we realised very quickly we could do a four-women series. They are popular – things like *Desperate Housewives*, *Mistresses*, *Sex and the City* – all based around four women with different personalities.'

And so the idea for *Never Mind the Botox* was born: a series about four professional women – a corporate financier, a lawyer, a banker and a doctor – all working on the sale of a high-profile cosmetic surgery business.

With two manuscripts complete, Avis and Berry started looking at the traditional publishing process but in parallel began to explore self-publishing, which is where they decided to invest.

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Never Mind the Botox – Alex



Reviewed by: Catherine Baksi
Author: Penny Avis and Joanna Berry
Publisher: Matador
ISBN: 978-1848766-617
Price: £6.99

Alex Fisher is a high-flying lawyer close to making partner at City firm MacArthur Warren. A chance meeting with an old boyfriend provides the opportunity for her to secure a deal for the firm on the sale of a leading cosmetic surgery business that could help her chances.

Despite leaving a drunken telephone message for the surgery's finance director, Alex is invited to pitch for the deal, which she wins.

Working on site at the cosmetic surgery clinic, Alex finds herself spending most of her waking hours with Dan, a hot shot junior whom, not to put too fine a point on it, she fancies the pants off.

Her chances of partnerships and her team's bonuses are dependant on the sale of the cosmetic practice going ahead, but during their due diligence Alex and Dan discover a secret celebrity client list, a dishonest surgeon and a botched boob job that must be kept out of the press and neutralised at all costs.

Away from the office Alex is busy planning the perfect wedding, complete with unicorns, to her musician boyfriend Elliott.

Elliott however shows little interest in either his fiancée or their wedding plans, and when Alex discovers he had invited his bandmates on their honeymoon and slept with a groupie, she has some thinking to do.

Alex is the first of four books in the Never Mind the Botox series, featuring the lives of four professional women

Written by lawyers

- Who Killed Sir Walter Raleigh?
- The Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter
- The Litigators
- Off Message: the complete antidote to political humbug
- The Hangman's Fracture
- The Serpent Pool
- The Confession
- Sentence Adjourned