

Taken Over

It was almost fifteen years after Roger began work for the cosmetics distributor that he received a letter from his employers;

"We are pleased to announce that this company has agreed a merger with XYZ Ltd, effective at the end of next month."

"The new partner will arrange to absorb all our current staff, both administrative and sales staff, into the new organization, with as little disturbance as possible. Neither of us wants to disrupt sales."

"Over the next two or three weeks the new merged company will write to each of you individually to offer a new and revised employment contract."

Roger read on about combined efforts, new opportunities, and other encouragements, but was not too worried as his unit was well under control. He showed the letter to Gwen, who smiled and kissed him as she was ironing the school clothes for their youngest daughter, their third, who had just passed her eleven plus exams and would be going to Grammar School with her two elder sisters in the autumn.

He continued his work traveling each week, to Shropshire and Carlisle.

Alicia greeted him effusively, as normal, and in the morning gave him a good breakfast after each energetic and exhausting night. Their son Timothy was now six and going to primary school, watched proudly by his mother. They did not discuss or even consider the takeover; in fact Roger did not even mention it to Alicia.

He did not go to Carlisle immediately as his Sales Representative in Manchester needed his assistance. They discussed the merger, or take over, because it would affect both of them, and they both knew that they'd have to readjust to new bosses as their existing senior management would be retiring.

He drove to Carlisle and went straight to Nadia's house. She was expecting him with their youngest child, an infant daughter, in her arms.

She smiled and kissed him. Their son was now three, and very mischievous. But his mother, and grandmother, both loved and continued to spoil him. He smiled when he saw Roger and ran to him wondering that there would be something interesting in one of his pockets.

Nadia was still a very attractive young lady, although she had given up her work in the pub as her first pregnancy began to be obvious. In fact, she had not given up her work but politely asked by her boss not to come back tomorrow.

She managed to get temporary work in their local supermarket, from time to time, but she and her mother with two young children lived contentedly.

The next letter Roger received from his employers said:

"Please come for an interview for the position as Northern Area Sales Manager,"

And the letter detailed the time and place, it also explained that following the merger Roger and another man had been shortlisted for this position. It did not mention what would happen to the unsuccessful applicant!

Roger showed the letter to Gwen, but told her not to worry.

"My record with the company is good, and has been for the last fifteen years," he assured her, as he prepared to catch a train to London where the interview would be conducted.

His rival for the Sales Manager position turned out to be the nephew of the new managing director of the merged companies, which did not give Roger much of a chance.

No decision was made immediately after the interviews, so that Roger could catch the train home. He decided to go and see his parents before going home and after phoning Gwen he spent the night with them.

Two men arrived at Gwen's new house about midday the next day and told her they had come to repossess the leased company car.

Gwen knew that Roger was on his way back, but the men from the leasing company did not want to wait, and cleared out all of Rogers personal items, including his mobile phone attachments.

When Roger got home Gwen was in tears, and she also showed him a letter terminating his employment with the new merger. The letter must have been posted minutes after he left their office in London. The letter said:

"We would like to thank you for your loyalty with us for the last twenty years, and in the circumstances we have agreed to pay you two month's termination salary."

He immediately discussed the problem with Gwen, and reviewed with her their immediate financial situation and the loan they had taken from the bank to buy their new house, which effectively bridged the gap between the sale price of their old house, and the cost price of the new one.

Roger was shocked, but he remembered some friends that he had been at college with. Mike at the Ford agency was one, and was now their sales director.

Mike recommended taking legal advice and recommended a local firm with terminal employment experience.

Roger went to see them.

"There is a new enactment on unfair dismissal, and in our opinion your status does appear to be grossly unfair," they told him, "but the legislation is so new we are still struggling..."

"However," one of the junior partners explained, "There was now an employment tribunal, and if he agreed they would like to put his situation before them as a test case!"

Roger nodded and the lawyers immediately filed Roger's unfair dismissal case with the Employment Tribunal, and a Notice to Appear was sent to his former employers. One of them actually telephone Roger complaining about his action, but the Tribunal was insistent that the employers be represented at the Tribunal.

Privately, Roger was also worried about Nadia and her two young children, but he had not told Gwen about Nadia, nor about Alicia, nor did he mention that problem to the legal firm.

He checked his bank account, which just showed his balance, but did not reflect his termination pay. He immediately paid some money to Nadia's account and wondered what to do next.

Roger told Nadia that she should apply for National Assistance, which she did, with details of her husband and their two children. He told her on the telephone that he was looking for another job and would tell her when he had found one.

The Job Centre interviewed Nadia, who told them quite correctly that her husband was looking for work and could not attend the interview with her.

Nonetheless, they awarded her a weekly allowance for herself and her two infant children. She had shown them her Post Office Savings account, and they were happy that she did not have any concealed funds.

In Norfolk the day of the hearing with the Employment Tribunal arrived and Roger's former employer was represented by a young man from a local firm of solicitors, who was unable to answer any of the questions given to him by the Tribunal.

The Chairman of the Tribunal was angry, and the local solicitor was given one week to submit the answers to the questions he had been asked. One of the members of the Tribunal, a local Trade Union member, was heard muttering about disrespect and contempt!

The solicitor reported the following week that the former employer did not want to admit any liability, but were prepared to increase the severance pay

to Roger to three months. But, so far Roger told them when asked, that the original offer of two months' pay had never been received.

The Employment Tribunal dismissed that offer without even discussing the situation with Roger or his own lawyers. They told the solicitor that a representative of the former employer should attend the next hearing, and they fixed a day and time for the following week.

Gwen had managed to take Roger's mobile phone out of the leased car before it was reprocessed by the leasing company, and one morning he received a call on that phone from one of the directors of his former employers, who had known Roger before the merger.

"I'm just was not happy with this merger, or the performance of the new board of directors, and especially with the Area Sales Manager who had replaced you Roger, and who spends most of his time in London, and rarely goes to his allotted territory in the north of England."

Roger listened but said very little. Neither the two months' severance pay, nor the three months increased offer had been paid to his bank, and he was running short of living money for Gwen and the girls.

Roger had applied for unemployment pay, and he and Gwen had attended an interview for assessment – a man, his wife and three daughters.

He went to see his bank, and asked them to suspend his monthly payments to them whilst the Employment Tribunal was being held. The bank manager wasn't happy, and suggested that Roger put his house on the market.

Kick a man when he's down, thought Roger.

Roger's parents then intervened as they had recently received the proceeds of the estate of Roger's grandfather. They offered Roger and Gwen some funds, but Roger's lawyers recommended that he refuse any transfer to his bank, whilst the Employment Tribunal were deliberating.

The former employer did not attend the hearing, pleading illness through the local firm of solicitors! The Trade Union member in the tribunal was no longer angry, he was furious!

The Tribunal met again in the afternoon and awarded Roger twelve month's salary, and a lump sum representing a proportion of the commission he had usually earned in prior years. They also added that this money should be paid to the Tribunal, not Roger, within ten working days of the notice.

Roger's lawyers told him later that this gave the employers a chance to appeal, but to appeal they would also have to make the payment to the Tribunal and attend the hearing themselves.

The decision of the Tribunal received local Press coverage, and then a national broadsheet added a small item to their regional news column.

The trouble was Roger's name, not just Roger, but his full name which was quite distinctive.

Roger Audley Brandon had lived and worked quite quietly at looking for a new job until a lady working in the unemployment Office in Carlisle noticed the article in the national broadsheet.

Funny, she thought to herself, *we've got a Roger Audley Brandon living here in Carlisle as well!* As it happened, she and a large number of ladies nationwide had been watching the newly televised adaptation of the novel *Lady Audley's Secret* by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, which dealt with the problems of accidental bigamy, plus several other crimes.

She didn't think about it anymore for several days.

A few days later Roger telephoned Alicia to ask how she and Timothy were getting on, but she did not say much.

It was next time he phoned that she asked a bit gruffly; "Your name is Roger Audley Brandon, isn't it?" She was looking at her marriage certificate.

"Yes," said Roger.

"Then who's the Roger Audley Brandon who's been awarded a year's pay by the Employment Tribunal in Norfolk?" she asked and did not sound happy.

Roger did not say anything, and Alicia put down the phone.

Alicia decided to go and see a friend who worked in a lawyers' office;

"Here's my Marriage Certificate, and here's Timothy's Birth Certificate," she showed her friend the documents.

Her friend recommended that she see one of the partners in the law firm, which she did a few days later.

She took her Marriage Certificate and Timothy's Birth Certificate with her, and the press cutting of Roger's award from the Tribunal, so that the lawyer could see Roger's signature on the Marriage Certificate.

"Did you know that," he hesitated and looked at the papers in front of him, "that Roger was married before you met him?"

"No," she insisted, "that was something we never discussed,"

"Never?"

"No" she replied, "Roger was a frequent visitor to the Guest House for some time before we were overbooked one night, and I lent him my room," she explained, "we all liked Roger, me especially,"

"And where did you sleep?"

"I planned to spend that night with my mother, and then I thought it would be a good idea to surprise Roger."

"So please tell me," asked the lawyer, "who seduced whom?"

Alicia actually laughed;

"Roger was asleep and I climbed into the bed!" and she added, "I thought it would be a good joke."

Even the lawyer was smiling; "did you get pregnant on that night?"

“Good lord no,” she replied, “But after that night I stayed with Roger every time he stayed with us,” and she thought for a few moments, “It might have been several months after that first night.”

“What did your mother say about that?”

“She preferred Roger to the men I used to meet when I was younger at those pop music gigs, and concerts,”

“What about birth control?”

“I didn’t bother, and nor did Roger,”

“So what happened?”

“After about six months I became pregnant, and I showed the results of the test to Roger when he next came to the Guest House, and it was my mother suggested that we get married!”

“Why,”

“She wanted the baby to have Roger’s name,”

“So when did you and Roger go to the Registry?” asked the lawyer.

“I went alone and they told me I had to give three week’s notice,”

The lawyer nodded, and he looked again at the papers;

“I see here that the Marriage Certificate is dated only six months before your son’s Birth Certificate.”

“Yes,” said Alicia.

The lawyer thought for a minute;

“If your Roger,” and he held the Marriage Certificate in his hand, “is the same Roger as in this Press Cutting” which he held in his other hand, “then certainly he would have committed Bigamy,” he decided.

“What can I do?” asked Alicia, “I don’t really want my son’s father committed to prison!”

“Is he maintaining you?”

“Money, you mean,” asked Alicia, and then added, “No, I don’t need any money, and I told him so. I have enough income from the Guest House,”

“Oh, I see,” said the lawyer, and he smiled to himself, “but look here, I have to report when we think that a crime has been committed to the local police,”

“But that will be publicity, that neither I nor my son needs or wants,”

“We’ll tread very carefully,” said the lawyer.