

A TALE OF RED ROSES

By
GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER

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SYNOPSIS

Sledge, a typical politician, becomes infuriated with Molly Marley, daughter of a street car company president. He sends her red roses.

On Molly's invitation Sledge attends a party. Before the crowd disperses Molly thanks Sledge for his kindness, and then he proposes marriage. Her refusal is treated as only temporary by Sledge.

Molly attends the governor's ball, and her attractiveness results in her climbing the dizzy heights of popularity. The notable respect accorded Sledge, however, perplexes her.

Sledge moves for the car company's reorganization. He asks Marley for Molly's hand, but is refused. Having financially ruined Bert Glider, Sledge threatens to do the same to Marley.

"Give him a big law job."

"We haven't anything fat enough except the Distillers' and Brewers' league, but we promised that plum to the governor."

"Give it to Lansdale," ordered Sledge. "I'll send Waver to Switzerland. I want his house, anyhow."

"You promised a consulship to Hoover. It's the only one Washington lets you name."

"Hoover's a nit," declared Sledge, turning slightly toward Bendix by way of emphasis. "He goes in the dis-"

"Good work!" approved Bendix. "Young Bailey Cooper has made a joke of Hoover's leadership. I think Waver has been counting on this Distillers' and Brewers' job, though. It takes a good man to fight the dry dad, and Waver knows it."

"He has to go to Switzerland," decided Sledge.

"How about Blake?" asked Bendix.

"We'll take a chance."

Bendix shook his head.

"Blake's against you," he warned.

"Besides that, there's an election coming off."

"We lose," Sledge rumbled. "We're due, anyhow."

"I guess you're right," agreed Bendix reluctantly. "So long as we have to lose we might as well make it a good one. If there's any other scandal about us we may as well arrange to have it sprung and get it all cleaned up at once."

"Fix Lansdale today!" commanded Sledge.

"I'll go see Schwarzman this noon and, of course, have him offer the job to Lansdale, so he won't imagine it comes from us. Schwarzman, though, didn't want to change his legal department until fall. That won't do, I suppose?"

"Today," announced Sledge.

"I got you," replied Bendix, rising. "If Lansdale takes the job he'll have to resign from the bench immediately, and no assent to this being necessary, he hurried out to make an appointment with the president of the Distillers' and Brewers' league."

Bozzam came, suave, smiling, a more polished gentleman than anybody, but not offensive with it.

"How goes it?" asked Sledge.

"Splendidly," said Bozzam. "The stock's all sold, including our own. We're ready to move on unless we can put over a real good organization of some sort. We don't want another little one, though. Traction companies are our game."

"Get busy," remarked Sledge.

"With the original traction thought?"

A grant of assent was Sledge's reply as he looked toward the high board fence in the narrow area.

Which had once been a mop leaved corner by one of the scintillating, decaying.

Bozzam looked at Sledge for a moment and, being a gentleman of rare penetration, rightly concluded that his errand was over.

"Good day," he said and started for the door.

Bendix and a big blue eyed man with a square jaw and muscular shoulders came in, and Bendix introduced the latter to Bozzam as Jim Gally. The two gentlemen exchanged grins as they shook hands, but neither one of them was careless enough to state that they had already met, although, as a matter of fact, Mr. Gally now possessed exclusive bar privilege at the new amusement park.

"Stick around, Bozzam," said Sledge. "Tom Bozzam gets his car line. Gally will fix the franchises."

Bendix, although the project and Sledge's resolution were absolutely new to him, never batted an eyelash.

"We'll get together on that at the hotel in about an hour," he told Gally and Bozzam. "Nothing ready to give out to the papers, is there, Sledge?"

"Naw!"

"You'd better explain to Bozzam what you want in the way of routes," suggested Bendix. "The franchises should be passed in secret session, Gally. Is everybody all right?"

"It's a family reunion," declared Gally. "Is that all Sledge?"

"Wait," said Sledge and looked out at the mop.

Everybody sat down, and there seemed to be some important topic in abeyance. They indulged in no trifling conversation, but looked out of the window. Bendix ordered drinks, which they consumed silently and solemnly. Sledge evidently had some weighty plan on his mind, for he only drank half his beer.

Davis of the First National came in, a pompous man, with a fish fat double chin and pompous white side whiskers and a white waistcoat. He stood at the other side of the table, but Sledge beckoned him closer, and Davis, wearing an impenetrable air of mystery, leaned his whiskered ear far down.

"Call Marley's loans," rumbled the boss in a tone which at three feet away sounded like a tuba sawmill.

"Is he shaky?" inquired Davis in a panic stricken whisper.

"He will be," promised Sledge.

"Why, he owes the bank \$55,000!" returned Davis, more panic stricken than ever, and his whispering sounded like the exhaust of a safety valve. "I'll go right away and protect the bank. What has happened to him, Mr. Sledge?"

"Nothing yet," stated Sledge. "Sit down, Davis."

Mr. Davis sat down, and the four who had been told to wait looked at one another with growing wonder and at the impassive big man, who was still drawing inspiration from the decrepit mop.

Five minutes passed. Bendix and Bozzam and Gally sat in comfortable quiet, resting all their faculties, physical, mental and moral, but Mr. Davis fidgeted audibly. He twiddled his fingers, he fussed with his cravat, he ran his nose in his watch cord, he wiped his reading glasses and put them on and took them off.

Five minutes more passed. Mr. Davis in desperation rang the bell for the velvet footed Adolph and ordered a drink. In other gatherings Mr. Bozzam would have enlivened the moment with a story or with conversation and repartee. On occasion he could have sung a song or recited a poem or played seven-up, craps or tiddledywinks, all with the pleasing finish of a professional. Just now, however, he remained as placidly calm as a cake of Swiss cheese.

A step came down the narrow passageway. A rawboned fellow appeared in the doorway. He was tall and big and wore good clothes. His hands were coarse and had bulbous finger tips, with extremely broad, stubby nails, but they showed no signs of recent toil. He had a wide mouth and prominent cheek bones and a low forehead. He looked like a retired coal heaver. The exigencies of politics had once made him county treasurer, and since then he had lived in prosperous idleness.

Sledge arose and walked around to the front of the table.

"Say, Feeder," he growled, "I've been paying you seventy-five a month for two years. That right?"

"Yes," he hesitated Feeder, with a puzzled glance at the unusual crowd in the little room.

"What for?" demanded Sledge.

Mr. Feeder smiled ingratiatingly, but paled in the process.

"Campaign work," he replied.

"What for?" demanded Sledge.

"Well, I— And, more puzzled than ever, he looked around the equally puzzled gathering. Even Bendix was at a loss.

"What for, I say?" suddenly thundered Sledge.

"On the level?" inquired Feeder. "I don't get this, Sledge. I don't see—"

"Tell 'em!"

"Well, if you got to have it—"

He stopped, gave another glance at his audience and stared at Sledge incredulously.

Sledge advanced a step toward him.

"I said tell 'em."

"Here goes, then," responded Feeder, exasperated—"for keeping my mouth shut about receiving the public funds interest money for you."

"You're a liar!" boomed Sledge and, suddenly stepping forward with marvelous agility for so ponderous a man, swung his right arm, the biceps of which was like a thigh, and knocked Feeder straight through the door.

"Throw him out," he directed and sat down.

Bendix accepted that commission as readily as if it had been a suggestion to ring for another drink. A rather heavy man himself, he stepped lightly into the passageway, grabbed Feeder by the collar as he was rising and punched him in the ear. Phil and Blondy, both gentlemanly bartenders, selected for the hardness and limberness of their shoulders, came running back as promptly as fire horses at the sound of the gong.

"Rough toss," explained Bendix briefly, handing his collar hold to Phil.

There was a rattle of chairs and tables and the crash of two or three glasses interspersed with an occasional smack. There were exclamations from a few hangers on and a few inadvertent oaths from the astonished Feeder, but Phil and Blondy were voiceless until, after battering Feeder at the curb until a policeman came up, they turned him over for a wagon call.

"What's the charge?" asked the officer.

"Pink necktie, I think," returned Phil. "But I'll find out," and he ran back to Sledge's room. "Feeder's punched," he stated. "Want it to stick?"

"Uh-huh!" granted Sledge.

"Copper's fussy. He wants to know what's the charge."

Sledge took a slow survey of his witnesses, and the faintest possible suspicion of a twinkle came into his small gray eyes.

"Attempted blackmail," he chuckled.



"You're a liar!" boomed Sledge.

CHAPTER VI.

Frank Marley Discovers a Great Team.

MOLLY stopped singing as her father called her into his den.

She hardly recognized his voice, and his face was so drawn and pale that she was startled.

"What's the matter, father? Are you ill?" she asked, deeply concerned.

"Not at all," he assured her. "A slight headache. Molly, I've been thinking about your future all night, and I am very much worried about you. Bert has proved himself thoroughly incapable. His fine old family blood does not seem to support him in a crisis."

"Did you expect anything else of old family blood?" she demanded, smiling.

"I didn't."

"As your father, I cannot help being concerned," replied Mr. Marley. "Bert has done nothing but whine and make weak threats and stay half intoxicated ever since Sledge shook him away from the complacent safety of his few thousands."

"I've given him two weeks to get over the shock," she lightly answered. "He'll come up all waxed and curled."

"His time's almost up," her father pointed out. "Molly, I think Sledge proved a very good case against Bert. He called him a pinhead."

Molly wanted to snicker, but she was indignant instead.

"That's better than being a fathead," she retorted. "That's what Bert calls Sledge. It seems to me that they're about even."

"That's where they stop being even," declared Marley. "Sledge threatened to break Bert and did it. Bert threatened to expose Sledge, and Sledge beat him to it."

"That's my fault," she half angrily acknowledged. "I bragged."

"Bert led you to think you might," he countercharged. "He even had me believing that I could defy Sledge, and it can't be done, Molly. That man's too big, too decisive and too fearless. The minute he found that Bert, and, through him, you and I, knew that Feeder would prove Sledge's guilt in the public funds case he sent for Feeder, knocked him down, had him beaten half insensible and arrested for attempted blackmail."

"He isn't just instantaneous—he's immediate," laughed Molly. "It was a fool thing to do, though. Feeder has exposed him and saved us the trouble, and Sledge probably will go to the penitentiary, as I told him he would."

"You have inherent ideas," kindly encouraged her father. "Bert probably encourages you in them, but it is my duty to warn and protect you. Here is exactly what will happen: Feeder will go to the penitentiary for the crime of not having kept his mouth shut. Sledge will be indicted by the grand jury, but the case will never come to trial. He has appointed half the judges on the bench, and the other half are afraid of him. His lawyers will fight from court to court on one technicality after another until election is over, and then the public will forget all about it. You can't fight a man like that."

"I can be the one human being in the world he can't order around," she smilingly insisted. "What do you want me to do—marry him?"

"Yes," was the unexpected reply.

"Great goodness," laughed Molly, "are you bluffed too?"

"Worse!" he said, rising and walking up and down in the few short paces the length of the room allowed him. He had a crumpled newspaper in his hand, and now he threw it on the table. "Do you want to be turned homeless into the street?"

"In the shivering snow with a little red shawl over my head?" she giggled.

"No, father, gray heaven, no!"

"It isn't a joke," he insisted, stopping before her, and now the mask of constraint dropped from his face. "Molly, you know that he threatened to break me. Well, he has done it."

"Nonsense!" she replied, unable to conceive of that condition in its actuality since there was no halt in their luxury. "It is impossible."

"It is a fact," he stated as calmly as he could. "At the various banks which Sledge controls I had obligations, which I thought were only nominally considered to be call loans, aggregating a hundred thousand dollars. These were protected by my traction

stock. Last week the bank carried them. I recently received \$87,500 in cash on a certain deal, and I had considerable trouble to raise the additional \$12,500. I had to deposit \$25,000 worth of my stock to secure it, and yesterday I had to put up twenty-five thousand more."

"But why?" asked Molly, sitting down and considering the matter seriously for the first time.

"Because in one day merely by announcing that he was financially backing a competing company Sledge lowered the value of my stock from a hundred dollars a share to thirty-five. That same announcement broke the West End bank, has crippled two others and made paupers of a hundred or more small stockholders."

"How horrible!" she exclaimed. "The poor people!" Then she wavered of such power came to her. "With just a word," she mused. "But, father, I don't see yet how he could do it. You say that your stock was worth a hundred dollars a share yesterday morning and only thirty-five now?"

He nodded his head in confirmation.

"Each share of stock represents a certain part ownership of the street railway company, doesn't it?"

Again he nodded.

"Well, the road is still there," she argued. "You still own as much of it as you did before. Why, father, Sledge has just scared everybody. Your stock will be worth what it was, or nearly so, after this panic is over. Even competition can't keep you from hauling people and making money at it."

"It can keep us from hauling enough to make anything like our previous profits, and earning capacity is what gives stock its value. That is not the big trouble now, however. I have a \$70,000 mortgage on this place, which is all it would bring at a forced sale, although it is worth double the money. It expires on the 1st of the month, and Sledge knows it. It is held at one of his banks, and it will not be extended."

"You'll have to pay it," she surmised.

"What with?" he demanded. "At the present prices, at which, by the way, nobody cares to buy, it would take every share of my stock to pay off that mortgage. I would be absolutely penniless."

"How did you come to owe so much?" she puzzled. "I thought we were wealthy."

"That's the way business is carried on," he explained.

"Then anybody can be broke," she decided, with a trace of awe. "Why don't some of you good business men get after Sledge?"

He looked at her pityingly.

"It can't be done," he confessed.

"Molly—"

"I know what you're going to say," she interrupted him. "I won't do it. I'm going to marry Bert if it breaks everybody!"

"That would be a very commendable spirit if you loved him," he quietly remarked. "I don't think you do, however. Nor do I, by any means, believe Bert capable of a love worth the sacrifice of everything. The Maryland Gliders do not constitute a universe in themselves, nor is much happiness to be found in a marriage which is a social triumph. I'm afraid, Molly, that you're stubborn and will not let yourself criticize your own mind."

"Of course I'm stubborn!" she admitted, as if that were a virtue. "The date is set, and it will stay set. Do all you men have to give up because I won't marry somebody? Is that the way your brilliant business is conducted? I won't be a part of a bargain. You urge me not to marry Bert because you decide I don't love him, and you urge me to marry a man who can bring your stock to par. Father, you're scared. Can't you think of any way out of your fluctuation but having me marry Sledge?"

"He loves you," he told her with conviction. "Sledge never gives up."

"That's why he wins," she asserted.

"He tries everything. Why don't you? Why don't you announce that the new company is illegal and that it will be fought in the courts? Have the newspaper say it can't build its lines; then the price of your stock will go up again. Why don't you trade some of your stock for stock in the new company? Why don't you threaten to stop all your cars until the mayor or somebody makes the new company build its lines away from your street? The new company couldn't have cars running for six months, and there'd be a riot unless the authorities did what you wanted them to do. Why don't you go down and shoot Sledge or hire it done? He would! In fact, he'd have done it by this time, I know. Why don't you go to the men who are getting up this company and see what you can find out? Then you can begin some planning. I wish I were a man!"

Frank Marley's eyes sparkled at her. She was standing, tall, straight and with flushed cheeks, her eyes shining. He passed his hand over his brow.

"No wonder Sledge wants to marry you!" he involuntarily complimented her. "You'd make a great team!"

She laughed and relented.

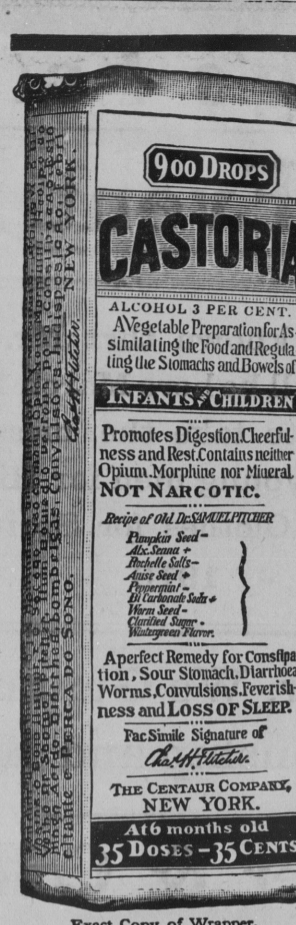
"I don't intend to be mean, but you drive me to it," she said and kissed him and patted him on the head. "Go down to these people and see what you can find out," she commanded.

"I think I will," he concluded, with a drowning man's desperation. "Molly, you're a gritty one."

Mr. Bozzam, in the privacy of his own apartments, reflectively broke the ashes from his cigar into his empty highball glass.

"Is the big chief panicked, or is he just enjoying himself?" he speculated.

"It's my opinion that he's picked up horseshoe nails with all four tics," declared fat little Timbers, eyeing the hated collar which he never put on



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MUNITIONS AND INCOMES TO PAY

House Committeemen Favor Taxing Them for Defense

G. O. P. FOR TARIFF RAISE

Poll of House Committee Indicates These Sources Will Supply Funds for Proposed Increased Armament.

The revenues necessary for carrying out the administration's preparedness program will be raised chiefly by changes in the income tax law and a levy on war munitions.

This is indicated by a poll that has been made by the ways and means committee of the house, which originates all revenue legislation.

A majority of that committee, including nearly all the democrats, favor relying mostly upon the income tax for revenues, and a majority also are disposed to levy a tax in some form upon war munitions. There is also sentiment in the committee favoring an inheritance tax.

While the Democratic party in congress, as evidenced by the attitude of the ways and means committee, is intent upon making those with incomes bear the chief burden of the national defense expenditures, it is apparent the plans of some of the leaders to tap this source exclusively are not too stubbornly opposed. It is evident, too, that there will be strong opposition within the Democratic party to any plan which contemplates merely a boosting of the surtax rates as applied to incomes over \$10,000 a year. Influential Democrats will insist upon a lowering of the present income tax exemptions, so as to make the application of the tax more general.

The New York delegation in congress will have to be reckoned with on this subject. A poll of all the members of that delegation who were in Washington showed they are practically unanimous in opposing further advances in income taxes unless there is a lowering of the exemptions and a more equitable distribution of the burden.

New York state last year paid more than \$17,000,000 in income taxes, nearly half of the total amount turned into the treasury from this source. At the same time the state contributed more than \$10,000,000, or one-quarter of the yield from the corporation tax.

There are forty-three members of the delegation and the most of them, backed by some members from other eastern states, will stand against any effort to lay an unjust share of the new burden on New York and other Atlantic seaboard cities.

The Republican members of the ways and means committee believe that national defense revenues should be raised by an upward revision of the tariff.

The poll shows that many members of the ways and means committee favor reducing the exemptions as well as raising the surtaxes.

The poll indicates that a majority of the ways and means committee will oppose any attempt to rely exclusively on the income tax for national defense revenues.

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until just before he went out. "The big chief has wriggled his way through the broken glass for so many years that he has thought himself immune. But his pneumatics are flat this time. They've got him."

"I don't know," considered Bozzam.

"They have to bring him to trial yet, and for a man who controls the sacred judiciary it's a long way between an indictment and a hair cut."

"They'll hang him," avowed Timbers. "The people of this town have been afraid of him so long that the first time they catch him out without his big stick every man in the county will be fighting to get on the jury which pronounces him guilty."

Mr. Moodson folded the other thumb on top.

"Possibly you're right," assented Bozzam, noting the capitalist's sign of extreme agitation. "When we first started in on this game I was afraid to think with my head under the covers, for fear he'd find it out and decorate me with a ball and chain, but now that they've got him on the run I think it's the psychological moment to hand him the double cross."

"Encore!" applauded Timbers. "He has it coming to him for reducing us to the pay of day laborers. It gives me the heaves to think of pulling off a quarter of a million burglary and only walking away with fifty thousand of the velvet."

"It wasn't safe to let ourselves wish we ought to have any more," explained Bozzam. "I know how we could slip our friend Sledge the twin X's, but the trouble is nobody owns the majority of the stock in the company which is to be milked."

"Let me do some guessing for you," offered Timbers. "If you sift it down to the bottom I think you'll find our aforesaid Sledge as the principal owner."

"You're a good barroom kiddy, but you have a skull of solid bone," gently chided Bozzam. "Sledge slid from under every share of his stock while he could extract a hundred for it. He may own a majority of it by and by, but he'll buy it in for thirty-five or less and boost it to a hundred after the old company has bought our franchises with the pretty quarter of a million it got for that new stock. Then he'll probably sell out and stampee it again, so he can buy it up for thirty-five."

"Solid bone was right," acknowledged Timbers. "I suppose nobody owns that stock just now."

"Not enough of it to do any good," decided Bozzam.

"Maybe the wreck has the biggest nest egg," suggested Timbers.

"The wreck? Whom do you mean?" The telephone bell rang. Timbers answered it, covered the transmitter with his hand and turned to Bozzam with a grin.

"Marley?" he answered.

"Marley?" repeated Bozzam. "Tell him to come up. Timbers, duck," he directed as soon as the invitation had been extended. "Moodson, I think I'll have to be mysterious with President Fluff."

Mr. Moodson arose amid vast silence, looked at his watch and went away to keep a deferred appointment with melancholy solitude. Timbers jerked on his collar with fat speed, removed the high ball glasses into the bathroom, snatched a towel, a newspaper and a napkin from the bed, patted up the pillows, grabbed his hat and was gone.

(To be continued.)

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