

A TALE OF RED ROSES

By
GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER

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SYNOPSIS

Sledge, a typical politician, becomes infatuated 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.

Marley's loans are ordered called by Sledge. Feeder, who receives a salary for keeping quiet about the public fund scandal, confesses during Sledge's questioning and is roughly handled.

Molly becomes angry at her father's obvious fear of Sledge. He tells her to marry him, but she refuses and suggests a fight on Sledge, which encourages Marley.

Sledge visits Bozzam, and a heated argument arises. The chief finds Bozzam is working against him. The reorganized railway company stockholders meet. Marley presides, and Sledge is present.

The two votes of Marley and Bert Glider are sufficient to carry the amendment to the resolution for the purchase of the franchise for \$50,000 cash.

Sledge receives an announcement of the engagement of Molly and Glider. Bozzam tells Marley Sledge decided not to sell the franchise at any price, and that he is financially dead.

Sledge goes to the state capital and gets everything fixed up for the passage of a bill granting a new car company a fifty year franchise free of charge.

Marley visits the state senator at home and meets Sledge. He finds out the particulars of the bill and then wires a syndicate for best offer for controlling interest.

At her father's suggestion Molly, accompanied by Fern, visits Sledge. Delighted, Sledge again starts to lavish presents on her. Marley arranges a meeting with the chief.

Two exquisite autos are sent Molly and Fern. Sledge orders Marley to say he sent them. A quarrel arises between Glider and Molly, but he checks it quickly.

Sledge presents Molly with a magnificent diamond at the theater. Marley sells his stock. The political leader learns that Molly and Glider are to be married in the afternoon.

CHAPTER XV.

A Large Surprise For Each of the Girls.

LEDGE began his deliberate siege upon Molly with the same care and vigor that he would have exercised in conducting a most important political campaign.

On that first evening at the theater he made Molly's wishes, expressed or unexpressed, both a study and a law. A draft blew on her. She had a scarf around her shoulders before she was through with her first slight shiver, and immediately thereafter Sledge snapped his fingers for an usher and ordered the fire escape doors closed. She looked over the program of entracte music and sighed for a missing favorite.

"Write it down," directed Sledge, handing her a fountain pen and a check blank.

Laughing, she wrote it, thinking that he would no doubt send her the sheet music next day.

Again he called the usher.

"Take this to Joe, and tell him to have it played," he ordered. "Anything else you'd like, Miss Molly?"

"I'm afraid to mention a wish for fear I'd get it," she laughed in more or less embarrassment. But Fern, who was having the time of her life, giggled and, telling him to recall the boy, added a favorite of her own to the musical program.

"You can have a good time most any place," Sledge complimented her, with a growing fondness for Molly's friend. "You're a nice kid. I ought to have invited your gentleman friend along."

"I don't see who it would be," laughed Fern. "Molly knows so many nice chaps, but the most of them are such boys."

"Excuse me a minute, girls," begged Sledge and unlooked himself from the background.

"Where now has he gone?" wondered Molly, half amused and half apprehensive.

"He's probably noticed that some girls have candy," surmised Fern, who had come to believe him infallible. "He'll bring back a ton of it."

"I hope he isn't going to order the spotlight turned this way," snickered Molly. "He'd do it, I think. He's capable of anything."

"As long as it's nice," admitted Fern. "I'll bet you never had a man treat you with more respect."

"That's true enough. He's rather a surprise to me in that. He's a fine friend to have, Fern."

Just as the overture struck up Sledge returned to the box, followed by a large handed man of about thirty-five, whose face and neck were red from much cheerful exposure to the weather. He had a merry blue eye and pompadour hair, and he wore diamond shirt studs and cuff buttons.

"Tommy Reeler, girls," introduced Sledge. "Miss Fern Burbank, Tommy,

Miss Molly Marley.

Mr. Reeler in great heartiness and in friendliness all unafraid shook hands with both the girls and sat down by Fern.

"I'm in luck," he confided to the crowd. "I was feeling lonesome enough to take a drink when Ben dug me up and slipped me the news that he had a girl for me. How do you like our town, Miss Fern?"

"I love it," returned Fern, not daring to look at Molly, whose brimming eyes she knew to be fixed upon her.

Under the crescendo of the music the conversation became paired off, and Sledge, with complacent self approbation, watched the couple in front of him.

"Tommy's a right guy," he confided to Molly. "Big contractor, paving and city buildings. Wife died last winter."

"That was too bad," responded Molly sympathetically.

"She was due," declared Sledge. "I'd 'a' killed her."

"Was she so dreadful?" inquired Molly, forcing her share of the conversation.

"A souse," grunted Sledge. "Tommy don't touch it, but she got a different kind of a Heinz on every night."

"Drank?" guessed Molly, trying to remember for Fern's benefit.

"For the family," Sledge corroborated, "and all this time Tommy's a decent



guy. He deserves a good woman, but he don't get to meet 'em. He'd be a great pal for your little friend if she can nail him."

"I never heard Fern express a preference for widowers," she suggested.

"He's the same as not," Sledge assured her. "There's no kids. Tommy's a grand boy."

The music struck a pianissimo passage.

"Me for a blond," Tommy Reeler unintentionally explained to the audience, and before she could stop it the clear silvery giggle of Fern blended with the piccolo obligato.

Reeler looked around at Sledge with a broad grin and nodded his head emphatically in the direction of Fern.

"Having a nice party?" asked Molly softly, bending forward. But Fern was speechless.

The curtain rose, and the play began, and Sledge, bending knotted brows upon the stage, sat decently aloof. If anybody liked this sort of thing far be it from him to interfere with their pleasure. Between the acts, however, he came right back on the job. He arranged for Tommy and himself to take the girls out to see the new waterworks plant on the following day and to witness as balcony patrons on the following night a barn dance of the West End club. He planned a Country club dinner for the day after, and then reaching unobtrusively into his waistcoat pocket he dropped into Molly's lap a glittering bauble, which looked like a glass hickory nut.

"Take that down to Duvay's and have it fitted to your finger," he directed.

She picked it up incredulously. It couldn't be real!

"Why, it's a diamond!" she gasped as it lay flashing and gleaming in her hand, and she saw the perfect cutting and wonderful fire of it. The realization startled her so that she almost dropped it.

"It had better be or somebody goes to jail," he informed her. "That rock set me back the price of a house and lot."

"But, Mr. Sledge, I can't accept this," she earnestly assured him.

"Why not?" he demanded, studying her heavily. "You're to be my wife. She was panic stricken more by his look than his words."

"It's too large for a ring, for one thing," she evaded.

"Why?" he again rumbled.

She decided to leave out the question of good taste.

"You couldn't put a glove over it," she explained.

He looked at it reproachfully.

"Huh!" he commented. "It's a peach, though, ain't it?"

Here was a proposition on which she could heartily agree.

"It's a beauty—a marvel!" she enthusiastically told him, ashamed, in some degree, that she so much admired the live thing as it lay in her palm.

She handed it over to him, and as his palm touched hers she felt the tingle of him for the first time. It was as if she had inadvertently touched an electric battery, and she jerked back her hand.

Between them they dropped the diamond, and it rolled under Fern's chair. Tommy Reeler picked it up.

"Swell pebble, Ben," he approved and poured it into Fern's hand, where it lay glittering and glittering and glittering and would not be still.

"Oh, you darling!" Fern murmured to it. "Where did this drop from?"

"Present for Molly," explained Sledge modestly. "Too big for a ring. Can't put a glove over it. I'm gonna have it set in a necklace."

Three days later the necklace came out, but by that time Molly had given up all hope of heading Sledge off. The only thing she could do, she resolved, in a hilarious conference with Fern, would be to accept temporarily any crazy extravagant gift he showered upon her. After the need for fooling him was over she could send them back, and this resolution, once having been formed, the girls spent much time in eager expectation of what the next surprise might be. Sledge was at least making the game exciting, and his perfectly mad, but equally earnest, antics gave both Molly and Fern more fun than they had ever known.

In the meantime, while Sledge and his cheerful co-worker, Tommy Reeler, were keeping the girls busy day and night, the preparations for the secret wedding went steadily on, as did the business preparations of Bert and Frank Marley. Thanksgiving day approached, and things began to focus themselves in the Marley home. The representative of the up state syndicate came to town on schedule. He spent three days in going over the books of the company and examining into Marley's loans. Also, he looked up the matter of the franchises. The company had been given originally a twenty year city charter, which had been twice renewed for ten year periods, its present renewal having three years to run.

"It looks like the regular thing," he said to Marley. "I'm satisfied to give you thirty-six straight through for your stock, take up your loans and allow you the difference in value; but, before I do business, I'll have to see Sledge about this franchise."

"It was part of our understanding that you were to stay away from him," insisted Marley. "If your presence and your errand here are known, Sledge will do something destructive. He has it in for me and will wipe me right off the map."

"He might have it in for me, and I have to see what he can do."

"I'll make it \$34 a share, and you see him afterward," offered Marley.

"Now, I'm bound to see him," declared Mr. Goldman, who was a wiry little man, of great energy and decisiveness. "Don't you worry. He won't connect me with you. I've been in this game too long not to be able to cover my tracks."

Goldman's interview with Sledge was brief, concise and satisfactory, and he began by stating exactly who he was and whom he represented.

"We're looking for street car bargains," he explained, "and we've been advised that stock in the Ring City street railway is well worth picking up at its present price. Do you think so?"

"Uh-huh!" grunted Sledge. "None for sale, though."

"It does seem to be scarce," admitted Goldman. "Still, we'll take what we can get if it looks good. I understand there's some talk of consolidation."

"Uh-huh!" grunted Sledge.

"That would probably bring the stock up to par," judged Goldman.

"Can't tell," commented Sledge.

"Is there any trouble about renewal of franchises?" inquired Goldman, pondering deeply upon whether Sledge was remarkably frank or remarkably adept in seeming so.

"Guess not," said Sledge. "I got a date, and he went to keep it, wearing his new Prince Albert and his silk hat, his gray gloves and his red rosebud with such complacency as almost to induce Phil to give up his job."

Marley went home intoxicated with elation that night.

"Molly, girl, we've won!" he announced. "Go ahead with your wedding tomorrow, and be as open about it as you like. Tomorrow I'll lift the mortgage on this house and sell it to Mr. Stone, who has offered to buy it as soon as I can give it to him unencumbered. I have already sold my stock and Bert's, including the amusement park; have delivered it, and here is the check."

"I told you we would win!" exclaimed Molly and ran with the news to Fern.

"I'm sorry," confessed that young lady. "The fun's all over."

"It was fun, wasn't it?" admitted Molly, startled to find that she almost regretted the ending of it. "You still have Tommy, though."

"No," denied Fern. "I'll have to put Tommy in my pretty little blue car and send them back together. Poor Sledge!"

"Here's where he gets the first blow," sighed Molly. "You have to go up and phone him that I'm ill and can't see him tonight nor tomorrow."

"Coward!" hissed Fern, in mock tragedy and went in to telephone. She came back slowly. "Poor fellow!" she said. "Honestly, it's a shame, Molly."

Molly herself was rather listless. She was standing in front of a huge vase containing Sledge's latest consignment of red roses. She broke off one of the most perfect specimens and pinned it at her belt.

"Poor fellow!" she agreed; then her eyes snapped. "I'm going to make him send me his dog."

"I wouldn't dare," declared Fern.

"I'd feel miserable every time as passed. I wonder what Sledge will do to night."

CHAPTER XVI.

Interesting News For the Big Boy.

LEDGE did what any other fool lover would have done. He telephoned three times that evening to see how Molly was, and when he went home he drove two miles out of the way to pass the house. He was equally solicitous the next morning and handled his business with singular lack of concentration. The last two weeks had made him more slavishly in love with Molly than ever, and he missed her as a morphine fiend does his "dope."

Coldman dropped in to see him at 2 o'clock.

"I want to talk consolidation with you, Mr. Sledge," he offered, sitting smilingly in the visitor's chair.

"What consolidation?" asked Sledge.

"The street railway companies. We have just purchased the controlling interest in the company now operative."

Sledge turned on him a slow glance.

"From Frank Marley?" he demanded.

"From Frank Marley," repeated Coldman pleasantly, looking as if he expected to be applauded for his enterprise.

"You're up against it," Sledge warned him. "Did you pay?"

"Gave Marley my check yesterday afternoon."

"Today's a holiday," advised Sledge. "Better stop payment."

"I don't understand," faltered Coldman.

"You will when you're stung," advised Sledge.

"I'm not stung," announced Coldman emphatically. "Our people don't take a chance on getting in wrong. That check can be stopped."

"Go to it," ordered Sledge and punched the bell. "Where's Bendix?" he demanded of Adolph.

"Don't know. Want him?"

"Quick!" ordered Sledge. "Why didn't you tell me you were after control? Now you don't get anything."

"I get out—that one cinch!" stated Coldman, rising and looking at his watch.

"How?" asked Sledge.

"That's my affair. I'd be a sucker to lay myself liable by an admission of the knowledge."

"I want to know," persisted Sledge.

"I want to be sure of it."

"You're gunning for Marley," surmised Coldman.

"Sure I am!" agreed Sledge. "I don't want you stung. How do you crawl?"

"Do I get back in after it's all straightened out?"

"You can have a chunk of it."

Goldman surveyed him thoughtfully.

"They do say you stick to a promise like that," he mused. "Well, two weeks ago I had a written authority to make contracts, conclude business and write checks, in the name of my corporation. Day before yesterday that authority was revoked. We always do that."

Bendix came in.

"Marley got out from under," Sledge told him. "Why?"

"The wedding could come off," returned Bendix, with an involuntary glance at the red rose boutonniere.

"The wedding?" repeated Sledge.

"Look here, Bendix, don't you kid me!"

"I wish I was," replied Bendix, showing, for the first time, his knowledge of how important all this was to the big boy. "Molly and Bert Glider are to be married right off the bat."

No man had ever seen Sledge pale before.

"When?" he wheezed.

"Right away. This afternoon! They're being married now!"

Although there were to be no guests at the Marley wedding, the house was naturally in a state of much tension as the time approached. Molly, for two hours before the minister was to arrive, was engaged in the finishing touches of her toilet, which was fully as elaborate, though not so conventional, as if the function was to be the most formal one possible, and her boudoir, from one end to the other, was cluttered with fluffy finery, with toilet accessories, with two maids and Fern Burbank, the three latter articles being in a state closely bordering on hysteria.

Downstairs Bert Glider wandered from room to room feeling more in the way than if he were an unbidden guest at somebody else's wedding, his only human companion being an occasional contact with the thin legged butler, who, under the excitement of the occasion, had opened a surreptitious bottle of champagne in the pantry, and, there being plenty of room in his intellect, had succumbed to the inevitable gloom of the occasion.

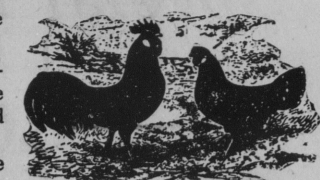
The most busily occupied one of all, however, was Frank Marley, who, from immediately after breakfast, had ensconced himself in his den, where he somewhat sadly finished his connection with many odds and ends of local business and social institutions, writing checks and friendly notes all the morning.

He even had his lunch brought in to him, for, truth to tell, he preferred rather to be alone than to be with Bert on this particular day. He felt somehow as if he could never be quite

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here had occupied a position of some honor and respect. And, try as he would, he could not look with too much confidence upon achieving the same thing as a stranger in a strange place.

It was all wrong, he told himself, and he would not even be properly thankful for the crumb of luck which he had wrested from the bygone feast. In his pocket he had the check which removed him from the nerve racking fluctuations of his street car fortunes, which insured Molly and Bert and himself an entrance into a new life and new opportunities, which made him safe from Sledge, and yet he felt no great exultation.

It was a relief to him when Molly had him called to look at her where she stood at the head of the stairs in her bridal gown, a fresh and glowing vision in her pure, shimmering white. The sight of her gave him a thrill of hopefulness too, the first of the day.

"You're a beauty, Molly," he called up to her. "I declare, I don't see how I have been lucky enough to keep you with me so long as this."

"That's a nice daddy," she gayly assured him.

(To be continued.)

CONFLUENCE

The I. O. O. F. Lodge of this place held a very interesting meeting recently when the following officers were elected: Noble grand, Gilbert Butler; vice grand, H. P. Burnworth; secretary, G. A. Frantz; trustee, J. W. Clouse; representative to Grand Lodge in May, D. P. Pore. William A. Burnworth, candidate for district deputy grand master of the county received the full number of past grand votes present, which numbered 20.

Miss Helen Bowlin who has had a long siege of illness, is improving.

B. F. Miller and family, formerly of Charleston and moved to the M. F. Bowlin farm at Horseshoe Bottom where they will reside this summer.

Elmer Shipley, who recently underwent an operation at Frantz' Hospital, is able to be out again.

R. J. Frantz, who has been at Bruceton Mills, W. Va., for several months installing acetone gas lighting plants, is home for a few days.

The Ladies' Aid Society of the Lutheran Church has contracted with a popular Lyceum Bureau to give five entertainments in their church beginning early in the fall and distributed through the winter.

Miss Marie Younkin, who was taken suddenly ill several days ago, is still very poorly.

Mrs. Roy Vansickle has moved from the Bomar house, West Side, to the E. B. Black house on Arden street.

T. W. Black has completed his new garage and has his new Overland touring car installed in it waiting for nice weather to come.

Mrs. C. M. Cunningham, who is confined in the Frantz Hospital after undergoing an operation, is improving slowly.

Charles McDonald, of Charleston, is reported very ill at present.

Rev. William Grant, the blind evangelist of this place, is holding evangelistic meetings at Rockwood.

Mr. and Mrs. E. W. DeBolt of Charleston, are making preparations for an extended visit in Kansas and Missouri.

Reports from the bedside of H. M. Lawyer, who was taken to a hospital in Pittsburgh several weeks ago, state he is just about the same.

Silas Hileman is improving and beautifying his lawn around his pleasant residence on the West Side.


The little child of Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Bittner of the West Side who has been quite ill, is reported better.

O. B. Maddox, of Fairmont, W. Va., is visiting relatives here.

Mrs. A. F. Groff entertained the Lutheran Bible Class of the Lutheran Church, of which she is a member, of

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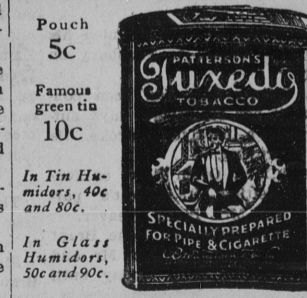
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her home Thursday evening. A very enjoyable evening was spent. A nice lunch was served by the hostess.

Miss Maris Younkin is improving from her recent severe illness.

The Lutheran Sunday school is preparing for a beautiful Easter service on Easter Sunday evening.

William Burnworth and daughter, Lucile, who have been ill for the past several weeks, are improving slowly.

A five thousand dollar breach of promise suit has been entered at Somerset by Miss Grace Stark of this place against Mr. Sturtz a traveling salesman of Cumberland, Md. Mr. Sturtz was recently married to another young lady, hence the suit.