

# A TALE OF RED ROSES

By  
**GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER**

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### Molly Starts For a Drive.

**A** LOOSENING of his collar, a dash of cold water into his face, a sip of brandy, restored Frank Marley to consciousness, but he was an old man. He seemed visibly to have shrunk in his clothes and the flesh to have sagged in his cheeks. He tried to smile bravely when they set him in his chair, but the attempt was a pathetic failure. "I guess I'm out of the game," he confessed. "My heart's bad."

Molly took up the telephone. "I'll call Dr. Brand," she anxiously decided. "Don't!" he begged, stopping her with his hand. "It isn't physical; it's mental. I've lost my nerve. Molly, Sledge wins. We're broke."

"How can that be?" she puzzled, unable to comprehend it. "You even showed me the check." "Here it is," said Bert, who had picked it from the floor and was smoothing it out. "Worthless!" Marley groaned at sight of it. "I can sue for it, but they'll beat me."

Bert edged in between Molly and Fern, so that he could stand directly in front of Marley and see his face. "Do you mean to tell me that our whole plan has fallen to the ground?" Marley nodded miserably. "How did it happen?" "I don't quite understand," wavered Marley. "I haven't the details, but by some trick Sledge has secured fifty city franchises for every street in the city, including mine."

"How does that affect you?" persisted Bert, his eyes falling again to the check. That document looked so much like real money that he was inclined to believe it rather than Marley. "Affect me?" protested Marley, warmed into a trifle more of life as he explained. "It renders my street railway company a junk heap. We lose everything."

"But the sale," insisted Bert. "Invalid," Coldman claims he was not authorized to act. Bert ripped out an oath. "I suppose that if the sale had been a profitable one you never would have heard of the invalidity."

Marley smiled and shook his head. "Then all our plans are off," discovered Bert. "The Porson tract is unsalable for enough to clear its own mortgage. Your stock and mine are worthless. You lose this house. I am stuck for the loan I made to give you control. We haven't money enough to go into business, and we can't go back east. Molly, it looks like a postponement!"

Jessie Peters edged closer and slipped her arm around Molly. "Not on my account," protested Marley, fumbling at his collar, and he arose feebly to adjust it before the mantel mirror. Molly, seeing that he wavered, hurried to his support.

He turned to her and put his hands on her shoulders. "I'm sorry, Molly," he said simply, looking into her eyes with more fondness than he was in the habit of showing her.

"We can stand it," she comforted him. "After all, it's only just. I feel so much less wicked if we suffer with all the poor people we have helped to ruin."

A short laugh from Bert interrupted her, and she turned to him with a rising flame in her eyes, but little Jessie Peters had caught her hand and was looking up into her face.

The minister, a tall chap who had won the hammer throwing medal in his last year at college, had withdrawn discreetly to the parlor when the conversation had begun, but now came back apologetically.

"I am sorry to urge you," he observed, looking at his watch. "I have a brief appointment, but I can return."

"I don't know," hesitated Molly, glancing at Bert. "Wait just a minute."

The thin butler, who was now cross-eyed, came through the hall to the front door, which he opened, and a second later he was sitting in the umbrella rack.

"Say, youse!" belted the voice of Sledge as his huge bulk, followed by Tommy Reeler, slammed back through the hall, filling the perspective like a ferry crowding into her dock. "Is it all over?"

Fern was the first one to recover from the shock. "No," she said meekly, but her eyes danced of the devil as they met those of Tommy Reeler. "Then it's off!" yelled Sledge and grabbed the startled Molly by the wrist.

Bert endeavored to throw himself in between the two and to face Sledge, but that experienced old ward leader, who had not forgotten the training of

his early days, gave him a quick elbow in the pit of the stomach, and Bert doubled up in the middle like a jack-knife and dropped heels up on a couch, clawing for breath while Sledge, as resistless as an auto drag, dragged the struggling Molly steadily toward the front door.

Opposite the library he met with an unexpected defender. The tall young preacher threw himself upon the big boy boldly, avoided the pile driver elbow, grabbed Sledge around the neck with his steel-like left wrist and with his right fist poked him in the jaw. Sledge shook his head and spluttered as he would in a shower bath, but never let go of Molly's wrist and plodded on toward the front door, trying to force off the clutch of the tall young minister with his mighty left arm.

The minister, whose heart was particularly in his work because this was the first opportunity he had ever enjoyed to wallop a man in a righteous cause, industriously slammed Sledge on his other jaw, and the smack was like a kiss at a country dance.

Tommy Reeler, who had been clearing the legs of the limp butler out of the path of progress, now strung on the minister's back and plinked his busy arms from behind, while Sledge



Sledge Steadily Dragged Them All Toward the Front Door.

steadily dragged them all toward the front door, with Molly now screaming and Mina, her arms about her mistress' waist, jerking her from behind. "Mina!" cried Molly. "Let go! You're pulling my arm in two!"

The weight of Tommy Reeler told at last. The minister's hold on Sledge's neck loosened, and he and Tommy tumbled back with a thud into the middle of the parlor, rolling under the very chandelier which was to have been the pivot of the wedding. Tommy, who had risen to be a boss contractor largely through muscular will, enjoyed a lively tussle with the young minister, but luck favored him, and he landed on top.

"Now, you behave!" he panted, with his hand at the minister's throat and his fist held in convenient range for microscopical scrutiny. "I don't want you to start anything with me because I aren't punch a preacher."

With a steady a progress as if he had been marching behind a hearse Sledge dragged Molly out of the hall and across the porch and to the door of his waiting limousine, into which he pulled her with the same careful force as a man landing a particularly game bass.

"Home, Billy!" he chuckled to the driver. Molly's first and perfectly normal action when the limousine drove away with her was to indulge in a splendid case of hysteria, not one detail of which was omitted. She laughed, she cried, she shrieked, she pounded her fists on the floor of the car, she tried to jump out of the machine, she laughed and she cried again, and Sledge was so scared that he witted his collar.

"You're all right, Miss Molly," he hoarsely cooed over and over, but finally a happy thought struck him, and, opening a forward window, he gruffly directed, "Say, Billy, stop at Sheeny Jake's and bring out a slug of rye."

Molly dabbed at her eyes with the slimy lace handkerchief which she had intended to carry under the cut glass chandelier.

"You are hurting my wrist," she complained.

He let go slowly and looked at the deep white indentations of his big fingers. He almost blubbered.

"I'm a slob!" he confessed. "Why, Miss Molly, I'd saw my leg off before I'd hurt you! Why, doggone it, you're like a fower or a butterfly or a canary to me! Look at that wrist!"

She drew her hand away, with a splendid assumption of cold disdain, that I am willing to marry you. "What's one thing you can't make me do, Mr. Sledge," and she looked him quietly in the eye.

He eyed her a long time and felt foolish. "I guess not," he humbly confessed. "I thought I could, but I got to let you be the boss."

She could not know how much that

with the first peal Sledge paled. "Hit 'er up!" he yelled to his driver. "I want that booze quick! Please don't. Miss Molly; you're all right!"

And he made the futile attempt of mopping his brow with the foolish little handkerchief which he somehow found in his hand.

"Let me out of here!" she demanded. "Nix!" he gruffly replied. "You don't fool me again. I'm gonna marry you."

"You can't," she told him. "It isn't legal if I don't say 'Yes.'" "He insisted. "You got to say 'Yes,'" he insisted. "Look here, Molly, I couldn't let you marry that pinhead. He's a woman fusser. He's been mixed up with them since you were engaged, and he'd never stop."

"It won't do you any good to belittle Bert," she flared.

"I can't," he informed her. "I kept my mouth shut, but now I got to spill what I know. These pretty men are always worse after they're married. Bert's a bum! He's got a streak of yellow the size of a canal. He ain't got the brains of a tadpole. He can't make a living unless somebody helps him. You'd hate his bones in six months. So don't you marry him!"

"I am the one to decide on that," Molly indignantly advised him.

Sledge looked at her a moment contemptively, then he opened the forward window.

"Stop!" he ordered Billy, and closed the window again. "All right; go to it; decide," he unexpectedly told her as the machine stopped. "But be on the level now. Do you love Bert?"

"That's my affair," she evaded, flushing.

"Naw, it ain't," he insisted. "It's mine. Do you love him enough to be poor with him? Now, be square."

Molly was silent.

"You don't," he concluded. "Put it the other way. How about Bert? Now, don't kid yourself."

Again Molly was silent. She could answer that question if she chose, and the picture of little Jessie Peters' sublimation of Dicky Reynolds came before her eyes, linked with the memory of Bert's face when he had suggested a postponement. Being broke was an incident with Jessie and Dicky and entirely aside from their love. With Bert and herself it was the love which had been incidental.

Sledge waited a reasonable time for her to allege Bert's enthusiasm. "You see, I'm wise, Miss Molly. That pinhead couldn't love anybody enough to go the distance. I can. I'll murder anybody you name. Want anybody killed?"

"You!" she savagely retorted and then, to her own surprise, laughed. She had put her hand on the catch of the door, but since he made no attempt to stop her, she left it there.

"You don't hate me that much," he calmly informed her. "You like me. Again she laughed, this time at his naivete. "You see, it's like this," he explained. "I'm a big slob, and I'm rough. I ain't pretty, and I know it, but I can start something any minute, and when I do I can finish it. You don't know it, but you're strong for that."

With a thrill Molly realized that he was right in this. She did admire force. She admired Sledge, and now that she had time to think it over, something within her responded to his direct and simple method of breaking up her wedding.

"But love is different," she replied, arguing more to herself than to him. "Nix!" he denied. "It's the strongest thing there is."

"Love cries," Molly mused, remembering Jessie.

"It hurts," he agreed. "It used to sound like a joke to me—dill I got it. Now I want to break chains with my chest. Molly, when I think of you I could holler. I don't dare touch you. It makes me weak. You don't want to go back and marry Bert, do you?"

His voice had in it a trembling plea. "No-Sledge-like that she would have pitted him had she not been so absorbed in her startling attitude toward the question he had asked her. Nothing seemed more remote and absurd than that she should go back and marry Bert.

"No!" she bluntly confessed. Sledge opened the front window. "Hurry up!" he admonished Billy, and Molly laughed.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### Molly Feels Sense of Relief.

**S**OMEHOW she felt a sense of vast relief, of freedom, of exhilaration in her release from Bert. It would have been marriage to have entered into a lifelong marriage with him, and now she seemed always to have had an undercurrent of that feeling which she had hidden from herself. A little trace of resentment rose in her that girls were taught to look so lightly upon the marriage relation that it might be entered into so thoughtlessly; that a girl might select her life partner because he was a good dancer.

"I don't mind confessing that I would in all likelihood have broken the engagement, even had you not come," she told Sledge, deciding suddenly to have it all out, to be perfectly frank, and for the first time to look her own self squarely in the face. "I had realized just at the last moment," she went on, "that Bert's attitude toward our marriage was not what it should be. That does not necessarily mean, however, that I am willing to marry you. What's one thing you can't make me do, Mr. Sledge," and she looked him quietly in the eye.

He eyed her a long time and felt foolish. "I guess not," he humbly confessed. "I thought I could, but I got to let you be the boss."

She could not know how much that

admission hurt him, but was vaguely guessed at it, and something like pity stirred within her.

"To that I must be," she asserted. "I thought we were going to your home," she added, puzzling over the out of the way route.

"Naw, yours!" "Mine?" she returned. "It was to be," he corrected, "the governor's house. I bought it, furniture and all. I sent Waver to Paris."

"You're a continuous shock," she laughed. "You go such big things."

"That's nothing," he sheepishly denied. "Waver's tickled stiff. I got him a big job. He didn't want to sell, though."

Molly longed for 'em.

"I thought the governor was going to Switzerland," she observed, wondering how things fell so conveniently to Sledge's hand.

"Naw; Judge Lansdale's going there," he told her, looking moodily ahead at the road. "You'll take me out to the house before you go back, won't you, Molly?"

"Who's there?" she inquired. "Mike and the servants. They went with the furniture."

Sledge seemed to feel no need of a Mother Grundy, and she realized, with a trace of approbation, that there was a fitness in him which made decency a matter of principle rather than of circumstances.

"I don't mind the ride," she laughed, feeling suddenly triumphant. After all, she had won her battle with Sledge and had reduced him to the pulpy consistency all men should be in their loves. The conquest was a tremendous one, she smilingly thought as she looked at him and remembered his reputation for high handed ruthlessness. Somehow, however, she had not quite the glee in her victory to which she was entitled.

He was so obviously downcast that she wanted to cheer him up, but she could think of nothing to say which would lighten the heavy gloom now settling upon him. That failure in herself made her feel rather mean, and she was not at all satisfied with herself when they finally drew up to the porch of the magnificent Waver mansion.

Sledge alighted immediately and held out his hand. "You fooled me before," he charged, "but that's off."

"It's off," she assured him in his own language. His big hand was warm and a solid, substantial thing to hold to. She was glad that he liked her so well. It was safe and comfortable to know that.

"Good words!" he approved. "Molly, you're a lady." He still held her hand. He looked at it foolishly. He squared his shoulders with sudden defiance. He kissed it! "Back to Marley's, Billy!" he directed and closed the door of the limousine.

Billy pulled away from the porch. She waved her hand at Sledge as they made the turn. There was a new drop on his shoulders as he stood there on the stately big porch all alone in his black Prince Albert, with a red rose in his buttonhole, and his silk hat in his hand. He seemed so forlorn, so lonely, that Molly felt as if she were leaving him on a desert island.

Around the corner of the house there painfully limped a once white bull terrier, with one eye gone and both ears chewed to ribbons and scars crisscrossed in every direction. Slowly, tortuously, but with steady determination, he wobbled jerkily along the path and up the steps and rubbed his battered old head against Sledge's leg; then lay down with his chin on Sledge's foot.

Molly tapped half hysterically on the window in front of her and fumbled frantically to get it open.

"Drive back!" she called. "I want to see Bob!"

Bob looked up at her with a distinct grin as she alighted, and when she stooped swiftly down and put her arm about his neck he laid his head against her knee and whined.

"He's crazy about you," said Sledge, looking down at them both with hungry affection. "I got a big kennel out here for him, but he's lonesome. There's a place for Smash too."

"Oh, they'd fight," she quickly protested. "Not now," he returned mournfully. "Bob's been licked."

"Then it will be safe for me to take Bob home with me when I win him," Molly mischievously suggested.

"Plumb safe," Sledge bravely agreed. "You want to take him back today?"

"Not right now, I think," she quickly replied, with a pang of regret that she had given him this needless hurt.

Governor Waver's former butler, a gray haired Englishman of torturing dignity, came out on the porch. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said to Sledge.

Sledge turned and looked him over with disfavour. "Well?" he grunted. "Mr. Reeler is telephoning, sir. He wishes to know if Miss Marley is here."

"Come on, Molly," invited Sledge. "We'll tell him. Do you like that butler?" he asked as they went in the library.

"He is a very efficient one, I believe," she granted.

"All right; I'll keep him," he decided. "I did think I'd fire him and get a wooden one. Honest, Molly, that guy ain't humped."

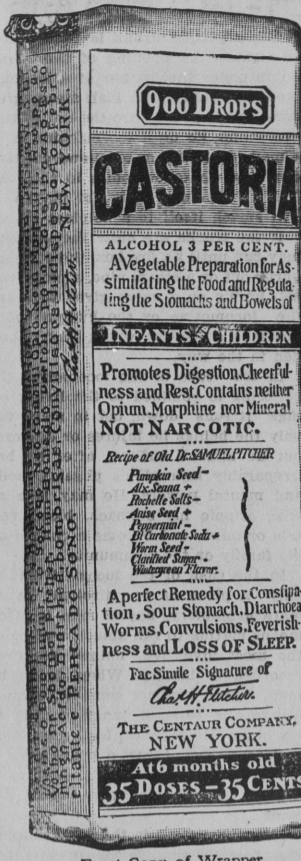
He picked up the telephone. "Hello, Tommy! Yes, you bet she's here. No, nothing doin'." Molly wins. Sure! Here, Molly."

Molly took the telephone, but instead of the full voice of Tommy she heard the eager one of Fern.

"Are you married yet, Molly?" Fern wanted to know.

"Not yet," laughed Molly.

"I didn't think you would until Tommy and I got out there," she chattered.



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"Oh, Molly, isn't it just great?" "Just what do you mean is so great?" inquired Molly.

"Oh, everything. Wait a minute." There was a pause, and then there was a great change in the voice of Fern. "Tell me it isn't so, Molly! Tommy says you're not going to marry Sledge."

"Did you really expect me to?" asked Molly curiously.

"Why, of course I did!" declared Fern. "You're crazy in love with him! You always have been. Now, haven't you?"

"Have I?" wondered Molly, dazed and thinking it over.

"Of course you have," insisted Fern. "You've been dippy about him ever since he sent out that first wagon load of red roses, only you're too stubborn to say so. I'm so disappointed I can't see, Molly!"

"Why?"

"It was so romantic. Tommy's been telling me all about it. Tommy's already got the county clerk by phone at his home, and he's gone over to the courthouse to get a blank marriage license. He's probably on the way out there now, to have you fill it in at the house, and Judge Blake is with him to perform the ceremony. I was going to bring out your father in my blue car and make Tommy run your red one."

"Have him bring Jessie," begged Molly.

"I don't think she'll come," regretted Fern. "Her folks won't let her."

"Dicky will," Molly assured her. "Invite Dicky too. Tell him I want him. Have him bring Smash. He likes Dicky. And bring all my red roses!"

"Anybody else?" asked Fern, quivering with eagerness. "You can't have Bert, you know. He's gone. He's hustled down to the police station to have Sledge arrested."

Both the girls laughed hilariously at that absurd idea, while Sledge stood by in a dumb trance.

"We'll hide him," giggled Molly. "If we can find any place big enough. I don't want Judge Blake. Fern. Has Dr. Templeton gone?"

"Yes, but we can get him again," shrieked Fern, whose voice had been gradually rising in pitch as she became more and more excited. "He'll do anything for me. Say, Molly, Jessie's here yet, and she just tells me that she's afraid she won't dare come. Sledge, you know."

"You tell Jessie it's all right," directed Molly. "Mr. Sledge is going to take father's company into the consolidation, and that will make everybody's stock worth a hundred dollars a share tomorrow morning, and the West End bank can pay out its depositors, and Bert Glider can sell out his stock and his amusement park property at a profit and go back east and be a social leader." She turned from the telephone a minute. "Say, Benny," she addressed Sledge mischievously, sliding her disengaged hand

affectionately up on his shoulder, "would you object to have Dr. Templeton marry us?"

"That preacher that soaked me in the neck?" queried Sledge. "Lord, no!"

THE END.

### MRS. LAWRENCE SIPE

Mrs. Alice Cook Sipe, aged 35 years wife of Lawrence E. Sipe, died at her home in Somerset recently. Mrs. Sipe was a daughter of Prothonotary Jonas M. Cook. Besides her parents and husband she is survived by four children, Henry, Dorothy, Carl and Roger. She was a sister of Charles F. Cook, Miss Elizabeth Cook and Miss Cora Cook, of Somerset; Mrs. George Smith of Rochester, N. Y.; Mrs. George L. Brown and Eugene Cook of Johnstown; Ernest V. Cook of Milwaukee and Miss Mary Cook of New York city. Interment in the Husband cemetery.

### HARRY SLAGLE,

Aged 22 years and single, died of tuberculosis at his home at Gray. His remains were interred on Saturday at Pochontas with Undertaker L. G. Hoffman in charge. The deceased served an enlistment in the National Guard, being a member of Co. C, and at the annual encampment he was always one of the liveliest men in uniform and very popular among his comrades.

### MRS. ANNA MAY,

Wife of Harvey May of Pine Hill died a few days ago at the Markleton Sanitarium of enlargement of the liver. She was aged 28; her husband and four children survive. The remains were taken to Salisbury for interment.

### MRS. THOMAS RINGLER.

Mrs. Ida Ringler, aged 47 years, died of cancer of the stomach at 4 o'clock on the 14th day of April at her home near Stoyestown. She was a daughter of the late Cornelius Buechley and wife of Thomas Ringler. Her mother, husband, one sister, Mrs. James Barnett, and one brother, Isaiah Buechley, all of Stoyestown, survive. Funeral services were conducted at 2 o'clock Sunday afternoon in the Mt. Tabor Reformed church by the Rev. Frank Wetzel, pastor of the Stoyestown church.

Children Cry FOR FLETCHER'S CASTORIA