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A TALE of RED ROSES

By
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PROLOGUE.

"A Tale of Red Roses," by George Randolph Chester, is one of that author's best stories. It introduces a typical red blooded boss politician of the type found in many American cities and a beautiful girl, with whom the boss is in love. Incidents of political intrigue and high finance are fascinatingly told. The author relates, as only he can, stirring incidents in ward, city and state politics. In his strenuous, spectacular wooing the politician makes the girl the favorite at a governor's ball. He has diplomats, artists and notables of every description pay her homage. He lavishes presents on her. He anticipates her every wish. His love is overpowering, all consuming. "A Tale of Red Roses" holds the interest of the reader from start to finish. Once begun it must be finished.

CHAPTER I.

The Dawning of a Tender Passion.

A COAL wagon, naturally choosing the rush hour for the performance, broke down in front of an extra crowded car, and traffic was promptly knotted for three blocks. A shining big automobile, following up the hill, came so close behind that the glare of the street car shone with unpleasant brightness on the occupants—a smiling red cheeked girl at the wheel; by her side a gray vandyked man with sinister lines running sharply downward from his down pointed nose; in the tonneau a plainly dressed and modestly pretty black haired girl with large and rather timid eyes and a slender golden haired girl whose chief mission in life, from her expression, would have been taken to be mischievous fun.

"Hello, Bert!" called the girl at the wheel. "Can you uncross yourself?" The rather large young man in the neatly fitting blue suit who had been jammed against the rail of the rear platform had already begun to worm his way out of the ill humored throng on the street car.

"I'll try it," he laughed, "although I don't expect to have a button left." The crowd, its clothing still clammy from the recent rain, made way for him reluctantly, even though it needed the space he occupied, for the pompous looking, vandyked man in the car was Frank Marley, by all odds the most unpopular man in the city. He was the president of the street car company.

The young man in the neat blue suit, whose cheeks were flawlessly pink and whose luxuriant black mustache was curled in two amazingly perfect ringlets, picked his way daintily through the slush.

"Bert, this is the treat I promised you," said the girl at the wheel. "Miss Fern Burbank," he guessed, clasping the blond visitor's hand, and at the same time he gave his left hand condescendingly to little Jessie Peters. "Welcome to our muddy city."

"Thank you," smiled the golden haired young lady. "Of course this is handsome Bert Glider."

"Molly's been telling on me," he lightly answered as he took the folding seat just behind Mr. Marley, sitting sideways so that he could address the two girls in the tonneau and still enjoy the clean cut profile of Ethelyn Marley, known to her intimates as Molly, for no better reason than that it was a handier name.

The lights in the car ahead suddenly went out, and a groan arose from the miserable passengers on that suffocating vehicle. A roughly breathed man, who had been resting his elbow in the wishbone of gray whiskered little Henry Peters, reached the point of heroic defiance.

He cursed the street car company and demanded, "Why don't they put on more cars?"

Little Henry Peters, who admitted he was a stockholder, took the company's part.

The conductor crowded back through the solidly packed aisle and the squirming platform to jerk hopefully at the trolley rope, and little Henry Peters, squeezed between his opponent and the fat butcher until bones

could stand no more, popped from between their peripheries like the inside of a grape, landing in the solar plexus of a tired Hibernian, who had endured more than enough.

"Get out of my stomach, stockholder," he gruffly ordered and pushed little Henry's derby tightly down over his ears just as another machine drew out of the fretting rearward line and, stopped by the ragged gutter, rested abreast of Marley's machine. The conductor having restored the lights, the attention of the uncomfortable passengers was now directed to the newcomer, a heavy jawed man of middle age, who sat as stolidly in his runabout by the side of his driver as if he had been at home dining.

"It's Sledge," said the man with the frayed cigar. "He gets his little old rakeoff, too, from jamming sixty people into a forty passenger car. While he's running the town this rotten old line won't have any competition."

"Mr. Sledge is a good customer of mine," observed the fat butcher.

"There's one thing about Ben Sledge—he always keeps some big city improvement going on," announced the Irishman who had extinguished little Henry Peters.

Little Henry pulled his derby audibly off his head and rubbed the red circle it had left.

"Mr. Sledge is the workman's friend," he declared.

"Aw, shut up!" ordered the gaunt Celtic laborer and kicked his ankle by way of accidental emphasis.

It was strange that, while everybody on the car kept the name of Frank Marley sacred to their hatred, the name of Sledge, who was notorious throughout the United States for his utterly conscienceless methods of public theft, was received with equanimity.

Meanwhile Sledge, turning to see who his neighbors might be, met the eye of Frank Marley and nodded perfunctorily and then bent his entire attention on Molly, gazing at her in stolid concentration, with no more change of expression on his heavy features than if he had been reading a timetable. Bert Glider noticed his rudeness and tried in a mood of intense aggravation to catch Sledge's eye and reprove him with a savage frown, but he might as well have tried to catch the eye of an oyster. Sledge, perfectly contented with the pleasing picture which sat before him, continued to stare calmly until Molly, discerning from Bert's countenance that something was wrong, turned to meet the small gray eyes of Sledge fixed thoughtfully upon her. She wheeled abruptly to her father.

"Isn't that the scandalous Sledge?" she asked, annoyed and still amused. Her father nodded his head and smiled, his nose becoming still more pointed in the process.

"Well, introduce him. I can make him stop staring, then," she ordered. "He can't drive on."

"I say, Sledge," called Marley, leaning forward. "This is my daughter, Molly."

Sledge tugged at his hat and smiled his acknowledgment of the introduction.

"Glad to meet you," he told Molly. "I didn't know you had such a fine looking girl, Marley. She's a corker," and once more he viewed Miss Molly with quiet approbation, in which there was a dawning glimmer of quite unsledge-like enthusiasm.

"I think so myself," laughed Marley. "First thing I know she'll be getting married."

"Sure!" agreed Sledge, contemplating her earnestly in this new light. "I'd marry her myself."

The street car ahead gave a forward lurch, and the flamingly indignant Molly darted into the opening.

"The ugly brute!" she gasped.

There arrived on the morning train, escorted to the platform by a distinctly worshipful porter, a tall, big boned gentleman in a light gray suit of fine texture, a plump, careless man to whom one would instinctively turn for a tedious funny story, and a hard faced man of a most forbidding expression, who looked about as communicative as a cabbage. This gentleman loafed about the hotel with his mouth shut, while the other two "scouted." Promptly at 11 o'clock they returned from their various directions and gathered in the room of the smiling tall one in the gray suit.

"Well, Timbers, is it as cheerful as we thought?" asked the host, settling himself in the most comfortable chair.

"Looks gray and merry to me, Bozzam," replied Mr. Timbers, folding his hands on his fat knee and frowning intently at a little slip of paper he held between his thumb and forefinger. "Sledge is, of course, the whole works."

"What's the approach to Sledge?"

"Tom Bendix," returned Timbers

promptly, consulting his slip of paper. "He shifts everything before it gets to the big boy, and you don't need any introductions. The best plan is to go right to his office and give him the straight story."

"How about Marley?"

"A bull," returned Timbers contemptuously. "Because he's the president of the street car company he thinks he invented electricity, and his noodle is swelled so that it cracks his scalp."

"You'd better lead me to this Bendix person," suggested Bozzam, rising. "Come on, Moodson."

Very automatically the silent man arose and accompanied Bozzam from the room with the air of being just as willing to do that as anything else. Just as automatically he followed into the office of Tom Bendix five minutes later and stood silently by, so oppressive in his inertia that he removed to himself all speculation about any one who was in his company.

"I want to talk electrical transportation with you," began Mr. Bozzam cheerfully as he laid the cards of Mr. Moodson and himself on the desk. "I am Charles W. Bozzam of New York, and this is Mr. Alvin Moodson of Philadelphia."

Bendix shook hands noncommittally with the two gentlemen and invited them to have seats.

"I don't know that I care to talk electrical transportation, but I'm willing to listen," he smiled.

"There isn't much to say," Bozzam stated. "We think your city needs new and better street car facilities, and we are here to give them to you if you will let us. The company I propose to form will be bona fide and will be incorporated for a million dollars in regular money. Mr. Moodson will take a quarter of a million of the stock himself. It might be some satisfaction to you to secure a report on Mr. Moodson from Dunn or Bradstreet."

Mr. Bendix grinned.

"It sounds like a high grade proposition," he acknowledged. "I'll speak to some friends of mine about it this noon."

When Tom Bendix walked into the Occident saloon he paused a moment at the bar, but even though his wishes were as potent here as those of omnipotence, since he represented the omnipotent Sledge, he had to wait, for both the choice bartenders were in delighted attendance on a careless fat man.

"Who's the entertainment committee?" asked Bendix, a trifle sharply.

"A total stranger by the name of Timbers," rejoined Phil, vigorously

ordering Sledge.

"I want to get acquainted with her," mopped up an almost imaginary splash. "He's so full of new ones that every time he opens his mouth he spills a good laugh."

"What's his business?" demanded Bendix, who was an earnest collector of definite information.

"Carrying hot ones, as far as I can get it," answered Phil, laughing reminiscently. "Say, this guy tells 'em so fast you can't remember 'em. Blondy just asked him to stop so he could write 'em down. He slipped in a funny knock or two about the street car service here."

Bendix walked thoughtfully into the little back room, the bareness of which, kept to its former crudeness by the wish of the boss, was in strange contrast to the elaborately mirrored and mahogany carved Occident. Here, at an extremely plain round table, he found the huge and impassive Sledge gazing moodily out the dusty window, while Frank Marley, with a half emptied whisky glass in his hand, sat regarding him with a puzzled expression. Marley turned with relief when he saw Bendix.

"I've just been suggesting that we build the proposed Ridgewood avenue extension out of the company funds, rather than make a new issue of stock," he explained. "By adding slightly to our bonded indebtedness we can do this and keep the additional net earnings among the present stockholders," and he stroked his neatly cropped gray vandyke, with the almost smirking complacency of a man who is sure he is earning a reputation for superior judgment.

Bendix looked at him a moment in aggrieved wonder.

"I don't suppose you remember that we first decided on the Ridgewood avenue extension for the express purpose of reorganization, new issue of stock and readjustment of shares," he chillingly reminded Marley.

"I know," persisted Marley. "But, after mature deliberation, it seems that to make the extension from the company's earnings is the more legitimate business method. I am not in favor of the modern practice of watering stock. The earnings, after all, are not increased by stock juggling."

Sledge turned ponderously from his inspection of the dingy little areaway as Bendix left the room.

"Your girl's a peach," he delicately hinted.

"Molly?" smiled Marley's nose. "She is a beauty, isn't she? The boys are crazy about her. It looks like a college convention out at my house all the time."

"I want to get acquainted with her," ordered Sledge, much as if he had been sending the happy word to some rising new politician.

A shade of annoyance passed over Marley's brow.

"That is a matter which is entirely up to Molly," he stated, with a trace of stiffness.

"All right. Put it up to Molly," said Sledge and looked out of the window again.

Marley hesitated and half arose. He knew that his call was over, and yet he had something else on his mind.

"By the way, Sledge," he observed, trying to speak as if the matter had just occurred to him, "that note of mine at the First National—it falls due next week. I am afraid I shall have to have an extension."

Sledge nodded imperceptibly.

"Tell Davis I said it was all right," he directed.

Bendix returned, and with him was Bert Glider, redolent of the odor of barber shop and with his curly black mustache waxed and brilliant until it was filled with almost painful reflections. He greeted Mr. Marley with much more effusiveness than that gentleman did him.

"Hello, Marley," he said, grasping the street car magnate's hand with tremendous man to man heartiness. "You are just the one I want to see. I've been trying to get Molly on the phone, and they tell me she'll be in at your office some time this afternoon. Will you carry her the happy news that Dicky Reynolds is in town and that I invited him to her taffy pulling tomorrow night? Tell her to invite Jessie Peters."

Sledge turned slow questioning eyes on Marley.

"You going to be home tonight?" he inquired.

"Well, yes, I rather think so," faltered Marley.

"I'm coming out to see you," decided Sledge.

"I'll be glad to have you," admitted Marley. "I suppose I may see Davis tomorrow?"

Sledge nodded assent, looking stonily out meanwhile at the hand hole in the high board gate at the end of the areaway.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A Woman's Problem

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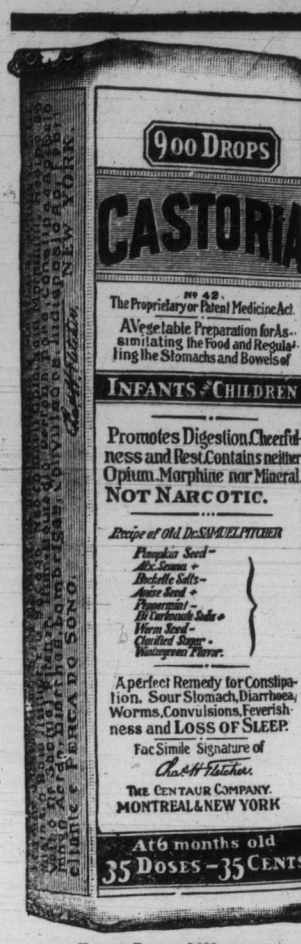


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Waterspouts.
A waterspout is constantly spinning. The moment it ceases it collapses. At the distance of about a quarter of a mile above the sea level its spinning speed has been estimated at six miles a minute.

An Indian Custom.
A social custom of the Crow Indian, which is often encountered among other Indian tribes and also among the natives of Australia and Africa, is the mother-in-law taboo. A man and his wife's mother never talk with each other, not from any motives of hostility, but rather as a token of mutual respect.—Southern Workman.

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