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7

A TALE of RED ROSES

By
GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER

"I'll be the proudest Gilder that was ever in the family when I can take you home as my wife," he went on. "It's all cut and dried. Molly, and we expect to have everything closed up before our wedding day if we can hold Sledge off that long."

"And yet you scold me for helping you hold Sledge off when you couldn't do it yourselves," she retorted. "Why you actually suggested to me that I should see what I could do with him."

"I don't like the way you're going about it," he confessed.

"You should be proud of me," she reproved him. "I think that Fern and I have done a beautiful job of it," and she began laughing. "We're going to put on our very best frocks tonight and be a credit to you. You're ungrateful," and she began to look indignant again.

"Let's forget it," offered Bert, laughing, and took her in his arms. "You're the girl for me, Molly, and there won't be any more envied couple in Maryland than we."

He kissed her and held her while he talked to her of the social triumphs which awaited them, the topic which had always pleased her most in their plans for the future. After all, they would make a splendidly matched couple. Moreover, she did owe it to her father and Bert to give them another business start.

CHAPTER XV.

A Large Surprise For Each of the Girls.

SLEDGE 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 entr'acte music and signed 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 spotlights 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 a decent



"Why, it's a diamond!" she gasped.

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 reached 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 pouted 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 pull 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. Coldman, who was a wiry little man, of great energy and decisiveness. "Don't you worry. I won't connect me with you. I've been in this game too long not to be able to cover my tracks."

Coldman'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 Coldman. "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 Coldman.

"Can't tell," commented Sledge.

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

"Guess not," said Sledge. "I got a sie, you come down with me. I'll send up Mr. Marley, and when he and Molly start downstairs you're to play the wedding march, while I back Bert up under the chandelier. Now, everybody to their posts."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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SUNDAY SCHOOL.

Lesson XII.—Fourth Quarter, For Dec. 17, 1916.

THE INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

Text of the Lesson, Rev. xxi, 1-4, 22-27—Memory Verses, 3, 4—Golden Text, Rev. xxi, 3—Commentary Prepared by Rev. D. M. Stearns.

The topic of this lesson is "The Holy City," but only the first two verses and the last verses refer to the city. Verses 3 and 4 refer to this earth when it shall be a New Earth wherein dwelleth righteousness (verse 1; II Pet. iii, 13; Isa. lvi, 17; lvi, 22). Only in these four passages do we read of the new earth, and it is possible that the passages in Isaiah refer to the millennial earth when the devil shall be bound in the bottomless pit for a thousand years (Rev. ix, 1-6), while the other two may refer to the ages beyond the millennium.

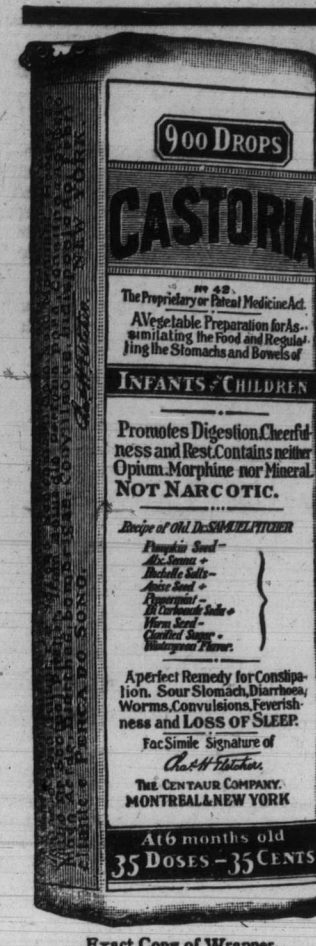
The time will come when this earth, so long cursed by sin and Satan, shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, and the nations shall learn war no more (Num. xiv, 21; Isa. li, 4; xl, 9; Hab. ii, 14; Mic. iv, 3). A king shall reign in righteousness, and the result will be peace, quietness and assurance forever (Isa. xxxii, 1, 17). The way in which God will bring this all to pass is so plainly written that only those who refuse to believe that God means what He says can fail to understand it. Following the letters to the churches of last week's lesson, we see in chapters iv and v the completed church gone from the earth to be with Christ in glory, and we do not find the church again in the book till we come to the marriage of the Lamb in chapter xix and then the return of Christ in glory, as the rider upon the white horse, accompanied by all the armies in heaven, to bind the devil, and set up His millennial kingdom of righteousness.

The church being taken away, we have in chapter vi to xviii, inclusive, an account of the great day of the wrath of the Lord, of which the prophets have so much to say—the time of tribulation such as never was and never will be again (Dan. xii, 1; Jer. xxx, 7; Matt. xxiv, 21; Rev. xvi, 18, 19), which the Lord shall put an end to by His coming in glory. In those days the nations shall gather under one leader against the Lord and against His people Israel (Rev. xii, 4-8; xvii, 12-14), and this leader shall be worshiped by all the world, all whose names are not in the book of life, and he shall be the devil incarnate, the antichrist. No such person is yet in sight, and there is as yet no nation of Israel against whom they will gather, but many things may develop from the present European conflict.

After the church shall have been taken and the tribulation begun a great multitude from all nations shall be saved who are said to come out of the great tribulation (Rev. vii, 14; R. V.). Many of these may have to sell their testimony with their blood. Then in chapters vii, 1-8; xiv, 1-5, we read of 144,000 of the twelve tribes of Israel who are neither the church of chapters iv and v nor the tribulation saints of chapter vii, but just what they are said to be—sealed ones of the tribes of Israel who will have their own place in the kingdom. By the judgments of the tribulation period this great age shall close and a new age begin, with Jesus Christ as Israel's Messiah on the throne of David, as we shall see in our next lesson. Then He shall begin His reign, which has not yet begun, for He is on His Father's throne, waiting for the time when He shall come to His own throne and reign till He shall have put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed will be death (Rev. iii, 21; I Cor. xv, 25, 26).

From Isa. lxx, 20-22, it looks as if there would be death during the millennium, but not as now, for one dying then at the age of 100 will be said to die in childhood, and many may live right through, but in the new earth after the thousand years, when the tabernacle of God shall be with men and He shall be as familiar with men on earth as He was with Adam and Eve in Eden, then on this earth there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, "and there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him" (chapters xxi, 3, 4; xxii, 3-5).

Now, as to the holy city, the new Jerusalem, the bride, the Lamb's wife, which shall need no light of sun or moon, because the glory of God and the Lamb shall be the light of it and in the light of which the saved nations of earth shall walk and shall bring their glory and honor into it (xxi, 2, 3; Rev. xxi, 3). I can only gaze and wonder and adore until I reach myself dwelling in it as my eternal home. It is described as to its form a perfect cube, 1,500 miles long and broad and high (verse 16), reminding us of the holy of holies in the tabernacle and in the temple, each of which was a perfect cube as to form and in which there was no light but the glory of God above the mercy seat between the cherubim. What may be signified by foundations garnished with all manner of precious stones, walls of diamond, gates of pearl, streets of gold, I expect some time to understand better than I do now, and, dear reader, you will be there, too, if only your name is in the book of life (xxi, 27; Luke x, 20).



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Presently a small boy who was to take part in the parade came along with a request for two tickets for his parents. He was told of the disappointment in store for them.

"Oh," said the lad, "they'll nae be disappointed. It's no the King that father and mother are comin' to see—it's me!"

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His Friend—Best congratulations!

The Subaltern—I've known her since she was in pinafores. His Friend (trying to say the right thing)—So you can be sure you are not buying a pig in a poke!—London Opinion.

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