

A GENTLEMAN FROM MISSISSIPPI

By THOMAS A. WISE

Novelized from the Play by Frederick R. Toombs

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CHAPTER III.
HOW TO PLEASE A SENATOR.
THE International hotel in Washington was all bustle and bustle. Was it not preparing for its first senator since 1885? No less a personage than the Hon. William H. Langdon of Mississippi, said to be a warm personal friend of Senator Stevens, one of the leading members of his party at the capital, had engaged a suit of rooms for himself and two daughters.

"Ain't it the limit!" remarked the chief clerk to Bud Haines, correspondent of the New York Star. "The senator wrote us that he was coming here because his old friend, the late Senator Moseley, said back in '75 that this was the best hotel in Washington and where all the prominent men ought to stay."

Haines, the ablest political reporter in Washington, had come to the International to interview the new senator, to describe for his paper what kind of a citizen Langdon was. He glanced around at the dingy woodwork, the worn cushions, the nicked and uneven tiles of the hotel lobby, and smiled at the clerk. "Well, if this is the new senator's idea of princely luxury he will fit right into the senatorial atmosphere." Both laughed desirously. "By the way," added Haines, "I suppose you'll raise your rates now that you've got a senator here."

The clerk brought his fist down on the register with a thud. "We could have them every day if we wanted them. This fellow, though, we'll have all winter, I guess. His son's here now. He's breaking all records for drinks."

"You've done it with him a few times," said Haines. "There you go, just in time to get into a tall, slender young man, who was walking unevenly in the direction of the door."

"Well, can't you see what you're doing?" muttered the tall young man thickly. Haines smiled. The chap who has played halfback four years on his college eleven and held the boxing championship in his class is apt to be good natured. He does not have to take ofense easily. Besides, Randolph Langdon was plainly under the influence of whisky. So Haines smiled pleasantly at the taller young man.

"Beg your pardon—my fault," Haines said. "Well, don't let it occur again," mumbled Langdon as he stroled with uneven dignity toward the door. Bud Haines laughed.

"I guess young Langdon is going to be one of the boys, isn't he?" "He's already one of them when it comes to a question of fluid capacity," laughed some one behind him, and Bud whirled to meet the gaze of his friend, Dick Cullen, representative of one of the big Chicago dailies.

"You down here to see Langdon, too?" commented Bud. "Queer rook where this senator is to hang out, isn't it?" "It can't be a rich one, then," suggested Haines.

"Nothing, except that the Evening Call printed a picture of his eldest daughter—says she's the queen daughter of the south, a famous beauty, rich planter for a father, mother left her a fortune."

"She'll cut quite a social caper with this hotel's name on her cards, won't she?" broke in Haines as he led Cullen to a seat to await the expected legislator, whose train was late.

"I don't know very much about him myself," said Haines. "All I've been able to discover is that Stevens said the word which elected him, and that looks bad. Great glory, when I think that a senator of the right sort has a chance to do here in Washington—a nonpartisan, straight out from the shoulder man!" He paused to shake his head in disgust. "You know these fellows here in the senate don't even see their chance. Why, if you and I didn't do any more to hold our jobs than they do we'd be fired by wire the first day. They know just the old political game, that's all."

"It's a great game, though, Bud," sighed Cullen longingly, for, like many

don appears." He caught his friend by the arm and in spite of protest dragged him off to the cafe just as young Langdon and Congressman Norton came down through the lobby. Though but few years older than Randolph Langdon, Charles Norton had long exercised strong influence over him because of his wider experience in the world's affairs. Like his father, young Langdon had stayed close to the plantation most of his life, particularly after leaving school, devoting his attention to studying the business of conducting the family's big estate. Norton brought him the atmosphere of the big outside world he yearned to see even as did his sister Carolina, and he imitated Norton's manners, his dress and mode of speech. The congressman's subtle confiding in Randolph, a habit of compliment, was deeply appreciated by the lad, who unconsciously became a continual advertiser of Norton's many virtues to Carolina and to his father, all of which the congressman knew.

That Norton's political career was the outcome of Carolina Langdon's ambition to shine in gay society was known to his friends as well as his family, and his desire to win her and place her where she could satisfy every whim had developed almost to a frenzy. Seeing evidences of Senator Stevens' vast influence, he did not hesitate to seek a close relationship with him, and the senator was clever enough to lead Norton to consider him his friend.

At the start of his political career Norton had higher ideas of honor than guided his actions now that he had become a part of the political machine that controlled his native state of Mississippi and of the bipartisan combination that dominated both houses of congress in the interest of the great railway and industrial corporations. Senator Stevens and other power had so dominated Norton's mind that he had lost touch with the principles that had been drilled into him as a child.

"Sure, it's a great game, as a game," agreed Haines. "So is bridge, and stud poker, and three card monte, and flim-flam generally. Take this new man Langdon, for instance. Chosen by Stevens he'll probably be perfectly obedient, perfectly easy going, perfectly blind and—perfectly useless. What's wanted now is to get the work done, not play the game."

"Thorougly a cynic through his years of experience as a newspaper man, which had shown the inside workings of many important phases of the seemingly conventional life of this complex world, Cullen pretended unbounded enthusiasm.

"Hear! Hear!" he shouted. "All you earnest citizens be voted for Reformers Haines. I'm for you, Bud. What do I get in your cabinet? I've joined the reformers, too, and, like all of them, me for P-U-R-T-Y as long as she gives me a meat ticket."

But not even Cullen could make Haines consider his views on the necessity of political regeneration to be ridiculous. His optimism could not be snuffed out, for he was a genuine believer that the natural tendency of humankind was to do right. Wrong he believed to be the outcome of unnatural causes. This quality, combined with his practical knowledge of the world and his courage, made him a formidable man, one who would one day accomplish big things—if he got the chance.

"You know you can't shut me up, Dick," was his response to Cullen's oratorical flight. "I'm going to have my say. I don't see why a senator shouldn't be honest. All I want them to do is to play a new game. Let 'em at least seem to be honest, attend to their business, forget politics. The country sends them here to work, and if they do the work the people really don't care a hang what party they belong to."

"Come out of it, Bud. Your brain is wobbly," yawned Cullen wearily. "I'll buy a drink if you'll quiet down. Let's be comfortable till this fellow Langdon comes."

"One hundred thousand! You mean I could make a hundred thousand with my fifty between now and spring?" "Sure as a slugger likes gin," replied Norton confidently.

"How?" asked Langdon. The young congressman leaned over confidentially. "This is under your hat, Randolph. You can keep quiet?" Langdon nodded eagerly. "Then put it into Altaicola land."

"The naval base?" gasped Langdon. Norton nodded. "Now you've hit it. The government will select Altaicola for a naval base. Then land will jump way up to never and you'll clear up a hundred thousand at the least. Isn't it simple? There are a thousand people with money who would just love to have this chance. And I'm giving it to you because of our friendship. I want to do you a good turn. I've got my money in there."

Young Langdon was visibly impressed. "You've always treated me right, Charlie; you've been for me, I know. But suppose the government doesn't select Altaicola. Gulf City's in the running."

Norton laughed sarcastically. "Gulf City is a big bunch of mud flats. Besides, I'll tell you something else. Just between us, remember." He went on for the boy's eager nod before he went on. "The big men are behind Altaicola. Standard Steel wants Altaicola, and what Standard Steel wants from congress you can bet your bottom dollar Standard Steel gets. They know their business at No. 10 Broadway. Now, then, are you satisfied?"

Langdon was more than satisfied. Already he felt himself rich, and honestly rich, too, for Norton had convinced him that there was no reason why he should not use the \$50,000 of his father's, when it had to lie in the bank anyhow all winter, and he would have it back in time to use on the plantation in the spring when it was needed. How proud of him his father would be when he showed him a clear profit of \$100,000!

"I'll get the drafts at once, Charlie, and I'm mighty much obliged to you," he said, with gratitude in his voice.

"Make a hundred thousand with it," Norton's smile was one of deep satisfaction. "That's all right, Randolph. You know I want to do anything I can for you."

"I know the representative of the Morning Star! How do you do, Senator?" "I'm glad to see you," suggested the newspaper man. "Peabody appeared to be all right."

"I have always found Stevens," he said, "that a little attention like this to a new man is never wasted, and I make it a rule not to overlook opportunities."

"You can swing him?" asked Peabody sharply. Stevens drew closer to Peabody. "I ejected him, and he knows it," he chuckled.

"And it's likely that a man like Langdon, new to politics—a simple gentleman of the old school, as you describe him—might have considerable influence on opinion throughout the country."

Langdon's colleague grasped the arm of the senatorial dictator. "He's just the man we want, senator. He's one of those old fellows you just have to believe when he talks."

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Langdon was starting for his room when Haines and Cullen turned sharply around the corner of the hotel desk. Again Bud and the young southerner accidentally collided.

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"Oh, it is, is it?" irritably replied Randolph, who as the "young marse" had been accustomed to considerable deference on the plantation. "Well, take that," he angrily cried, aiming a savage swing at Haines.

The reporter's athletic training proved of ready service. Dodging under the clinch, he turned dexterously, seized young Langdon's outstretched wrist and bent the arm down.

Langdon was helpless over his (Haines') shoulder as though to throw the young attacker with the wrestler's "flying mare." Langdon was helpless, as Haines had also secured his free hand, but instead of completing the "throw" the reporter walked away with his foe held securely on his back—to put him to bed, a kindly service, in view of Randolph's mental state.

From across the lobby Charles Norton had watched Randolph's discomfiting encounter with Haines with amusement. "Now that I've got the young fellow to sew up his old man's money in Altaicola land," he chuckled, "reckon Senator William H. Langdon won't see anything wrong with that same noble tract of unwise when he comes to vote for the naval base. Senator Stevens will be pleased."

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"Certainly," interrupted Haines, "but—"

"And, there being a vacancy on the committee on naval affairs," continued Stevens, whose dignity was offended by the reporter's interruption, "the friends of Senator Langdon are working to have him appointed on that committee, because he comes from the state where the naval base will be located and will, like myself, be more familiar with the availability of the various sites suggested than a man from another state."

Haines nodded. "Yes, of course. What town's going to get it, senator?" "Senator Stevens paused judiciously. "Well," he said, "Altaicola and Gulf City are the chief candidates. I suppose you had better talk to Langdon about it."

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"Indeed I shall. I'll tell him he's in luck to have the smartest young man in Washington on the job."

"All right," laughed Bud, "only don't make it so strong that he won't recognize me when he sees me. Good day." And he hurried away to keep a belated appointment.

"Clever boy," said Stevens as the newspaper man disappeared. "The boss of the senate agreed."

"Yes, only I'm not sure it's a good thing for a newspaper man to be too clever. Spoils his usefulness. Makes him ask too many confounded questions."

Stevens acquiesced, for it would never do to disagree with the boss. "It's very kind of you, senator," he began, changing the subject, "to come with me to welcome the new senator from my state, my old friend and colleague."

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Cost Sale.

Commencing Wednesday, Feb. 3, we are going to close out our entire stock of groceries at cost. Now is the chance to lay in a good supply cheap.

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Stockholders liability	50,000
Surplus	50,000
Total resources over	\$150,000
	\$300,000

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and that has contributed so much to the success of the nation. Hope Georgia, more girlish and a vivacious blond, was the special pet of her father and usually succeeded in doing with him what she chose.

A real senator and two such young women handsomely gowned seemed to take the old hotel back a score of years—back to the times when such sights were of daily occurrence. The ancient greatness of the now dingy International lived again.

"How are you, senator? Glad to welcome you, sir," was the clerk's greeting.

The general senator held out his hand. "Glad to meet you, sir; glad to meet you," he exclaimed. "Must make you acquainted with my daughters. This is Miss Carolina Langdon, this Miss Hope Georgia Langdon."

The two girls, with their father's idea of courtesy, shook hands with the clerk, who was not at all taken aback by the unexpected honor.

Hope Georgia was thoroughly delighted with everything, but Carolina looked at the worn and faded walls and furnishings with evident distaste.

"Oh, this is Washington," murmured Hope Georgia ecstatically, clasping her hands and gazing at a vista of artificial palms in a corridor.

"Ah, this is Washington," sighed the new senator contentedly as he gazed across a hall at the biggest and most gorgeous chair stand he had ever seen or ever hoped to see—the only new thing added to the hotel since Grant was president.

"Truly magnificent establishment you have here, sir; magnificent!" he exclaimed as an imitation marble column came within his purview. "I remember my friend Senator Moseley speaking to me of it thirty years ago. Are our rooms ready?"

The clerk, lamely pleased, hastened to assure him that everything was in first class order, waiting.

"You better go up, girls, while the strong man's world—which many a woman would give her all to enter and play a part therein."

"What else have you against a political career, Mr. Haines?" went on the senator, taking up their conversation.

"Well, my age for one thing. I haven't any gray hairs."

Langdon waved this objection aside. "I might arrange to pool ages with you. Sometimes I think we want young men in politics, like you."

The reporter shook his head. "Old in age and young in politics, like you, Senator Langdon," he replied. "Politics, I sometimes think is pure hypocrisy and sometimes something worse. A man gets disgusted with the trickery and dishonesty and corruption."

"Then," drawled Langdon, "the thing to do is to jump in and stop it! I read in the newspapers a great deal about corruption. The gentlemen in the national politics whom I have had the honor of knowing—Senator Moseley, my intimate friend, Senator Stevens, and others—have been as honest as the day is long."

"That the days do get short in November, when congress meets, don't they?" laughed Haines, rising. "I'm afraid I've taken too much of your time, and I seem to have talked a lot." Langdon was amused.

"Does look like I'd been interviewing