

# A GENTLEMAN FROM MISSISSIPPI

By THOMAS A. WISE  
Novelized from the Play by Frederick R. Toombs

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(CHAPTER XIV, continued.)

senator Langdon's secretary peered straight into Norton's eyes. "Because, congressman," he said, "if I were to put my money in Gulf City perhaps I wouldn't lose it." The southerner took a step forward, leaned over and glared angrily at Haines. His face whitened. "You don't mean that you could swing Langdon into Gulf City?" he gasped. Haines smiled. "I can't say that, Norton, but I guess people interested in Altacoola would hate to have me try."

"I didn't know you were that kind, Haines," said Norton, his virtue

aroused at the thought of losing his money. "So you're playing the game like all the rest?"

"Why shouldn't I?" shrugged the secretary. "I guess perhaps I'm a little sore because the Altacoola people haven't even paid me the compliment of thinking I had any influence, so they can't expect me to work for them. The Gulf City people have. As things stand, Gulf City looks pretty good to me."

"Is this straight talk?" exclaimed Norton.

"Take it or leave it," retorted Bud. The Mississippian leaned with his hands on the desk.

"Well, Haines, if you're like the rest and are really interested in Altacoola, I don't know that you'd have to go very far to talk."

"You know something of Altacoola lands, then, Norton?" said Robert, tingling with suppressed excitement. He felt that he was getting close to real facts in a colossal "deal."

Norton was sure of his man now. "Well, I am in touch with some people who've got lands and options on more. I might fix it for you to come in," he whispered.

Haines shook his head. "You know I haven't much money, Norton. All I could put in would be my influence. Who are these people? Are they cheap little local folks or are they real people here who have some power and can do something that is worth while?"

"Do I look like I'd fool with cheap skates, Haines? They're the real people I think, Haines, that either Senator Stevens or Senator Peabody would advise you that you are safe."

"Ah! Then Stevens and Peabody are the ones. They'll make it Altacoola, then sell to the government at a big advance and move to 'Easy street.'"

"That's right," agreed Norton. Bud Haines straightened abruptly. The expression on his face gave Norton a sudden chill—made him tremble.

"Now I've got you," cried the secretary. "You've given yourself dead away. I've known all along you're a d—d thief, Norton, and you've just proved it to me yourself."

"What do you mean?" Norton was clinching his fist. Words like that mean fight to a southerner!

"I mean that before Senator Langdon goes one step further in this matter he shall know that his colleagues and you are thieves, Mr. Norton, trying to use him for a cat's paw to steal for them from the government. I suspected something this morning when Gulf City tried to bribe me and a visitor from there gave me what turns out to be a pretty good tip."

"So that was your dirty trick," exclaimed the congressman as he regained his composure.

"Set a make believe thief to catch a real one," laughed the secretary. "Very good trick, I think."

"I'll make you pay for that!" cried Norton, shaking his fist.

"All right. Send in your bill any old time," laughed Haines. "The sooner the better. Meantime I'm going to talk to Langdon."

He had started for the door when Carolina Langdon re-entered, followed by her brother Randolph.

"Wait a minute," said Norton, with unexpected quietness. "I wouldn't do what you're about to do, Mr. Haines."

"Of course you wouldn't," sneered Haines.

"I mean that you will be making a mistake, Haines, to tell the senator

cause, you see, you don't know as much as you think. I wouldn't talk to Langdon if I were you. It will only embarrass him and do no good, because Langdon's money is in this scheme, too, and Langdon's in the same boat with the rest of us."

Haines stopped short at this astounding charge against his chief.

"Norton, you lie! I'll believe it of Langdon when he tells me so; not otherwise."

Norton turned to Randolph. "Perhaps you'll believe Mr. Langdon's son, Mr. Haines?"

Randolph Langdon stepped forward. "It's true, Haines," he said; "my father's money is in Altacoola lands."

Haines looked him up and down, with a sneer. "Your money may be," he said. "I don't think you're a bit too good for it, but your father is a different kind."

Carolina Langdon stood at the back of the room, nervously awaiting the moment when, she knew, she would be forced into the unpleasant discussion.

"I reckon you can't refuse to believe Miss Langdon," drawled Norton, with aggravated deliberation.

"Of course," stammered Haines, "I'd believe it if Miss Langdon says it's so."

The congressman turned toward Carolina as he spoke and fixed on her a tense look which spelled as plainly as though spoken, "It's all in your hands, my fortune—yours."

She slowly drew across the room. Haines could hardly conceal the turmoil of his mind. The world seemed suddenly snatched from around him, leaving her figure alone before him. Would she affirm what Norton and Randolph had said? He must believe her. But surely it was impossible that she—

Carolina played for time. She feared the making of a false move.

"I don't understand?" she said inquiringly to Norton.

He calmly began an elaborate explanation.

"Miss Langdon, this secretary has discovered that there is a certain perfectly legitimate venture in Altacoola lands being carried on through certain influential people we know and by me. The blood of the young reformer is boiling. He is going straight to your father with the

"My father—is—in—facts—the deal." "I have tried to explain to him how it will needlessly embarrass the senator and spoil his own future. He won't believe me. He won't believe your brother. Perhaps you can make it clear."

At last Carolina nerved herself to speak.

"You had better not go to my father, Mr. Haines. It will do no good. He—is—in—the deal! You must believe me when I tell you so."

The girl took her eyes from the secretary. He was plainly suffering.

CHAPTER XV. CAROLINA LANGDON'S ADVICE.

"LET me speak to Mr. Haines alone," said Carolina to Norton and her brother.

Norton turned a triumphant grin at Randolph as he beckoned him out and whispered: "Leave him to her. It's all right. That New York dude has been riding for a fall—he's going to get it now."

"I am sorry, so sorry this should have occurred, Mr. Haines," Carolina said gently.

The secretary looked up slowly, his face drawn. It was an effort for him to speak.

"I can't understand it," he said. "I mightn't have thought so much of this a month ago, but I have come to love the senator almost as a son, and to think that he could be like the rest of that bunch is awful."

"You are too much of an idealist, Mr. Haines," said the girl.

"And you? What do you think of it?" he demanded.

The girl's glance wavered. "Don't idealize me too much, either, Mr. Haines. I didn't think it was much. Perhaps I don't understand business any too well."

"Yes; I see at least that you and father can never work together now." Haines nodded affirmatively.

"I suppose so. I'm thinking of that. How am I to leave him? We've been so close. I've been so fond of him. I don't know how I could tell him."

In girlish, friendly fashion Carolina rested her hand on his arm.

"Won't you take my advice, Mr. Haines? Go away without seeing him. Just leave a note to say you have gone. He will understand. It will be easier for both that way—easier for him, easier for you." She paused, looking at him appealingly as she ended very softly, "And easier for me, Mr. Haines."

He looked at her thoughtfully. "Easier for you?" he said. "Very well, I'll do it that way."

The secretary stepped slowly to his desk, sat down and started to write the note. Carolina watched him curiously.

"What will you do," she asked, "now that you have given up this position?"

"Oh, I can always go back to newspaper work," he answered without looking up.

The term "newspaper work" gave Carolina a shock. She had forgotten that this man had been a reporter. Here he was turned loose with the knowledge of this "deal," which she knew would be popular material for newspapers to print. She must gain still another point, and she felt that she had enough power to win against him.

"I'm going to ask you still another favor," she said.

Bud returned her look with a bitter smile.

"What is it?"

"You have learned about this—this land matter and—"

"Oh, yes; I can guess. You want me to keep quiet about it—to hush it up, a shade of scorn in his tone.

"I only asked this so that you would not disgrace me," she pleaded.

Disillusioned at last, robbed of his lifelong optimism, scorn of his ideals, even his love—for he began to despise this beautiful, misguided woman—Haines sat broken in spirit, thinking how quickly the brightness of life fades to blackness.

"Very well," he said sadly. "I suppose you are innocent. I'll save you. If they're all—your father, too—crooked, why shouldn't I be crooked? All right; I won't say anything."

"I only ask you not to disgrace me," pleaded the girl. "You will promise that?"

"It's a promise." She sighed in relief.

"Father will be coming back soon," she said. "You won't want to see him."

Haines rose. "No I won't want to see him. Give

him this note. I'll have to come back while he's away to clear up some things. Goodby."

Haines bowed and hurried from the room through a side doorway just as Senator Langdon came in through the main entrance.

"Bud, Bud," he called, but the secretary did not halt.

Carolina Langdon stood with Haines' note in her hand, wondering at what she had done. She regretted having become entangled in the wars of men in Washington. She saw that the man's game was played too strongly, too furiously fast, for most women to enter, yet she rejoiced that the coveted fortune had not been lost. She was sorry that her means of saving it had not been less questionable. She saw that ambition and honesty, ambition and truth, with difficulty follow the same path.

Senator Langdon's face was unusually grave as he came to greet Carolina. Lines showed in his face that the daughter had never noticed before.

She saw Norton and Randolph, who had followed him, exchange significant glances—glances—glances—and wondered what new development they had maneuvered.

"He's gone without a word," the senator sighed. "Well, perhaps that's best."

"He left a note for you," said the girl, handing him the letter which Haines had given her.

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WILLIAM H. LANGDON.  
"You boys run away. I've got to think," said the senator.

When the pair had gone the old man drew the letter to him, and below his signature he added a postscript, "Don't forget there's some money coming to you."

Walking across the room to leave, he sighed:

"It was making the best kind of a secretary."

(Continued next week.)

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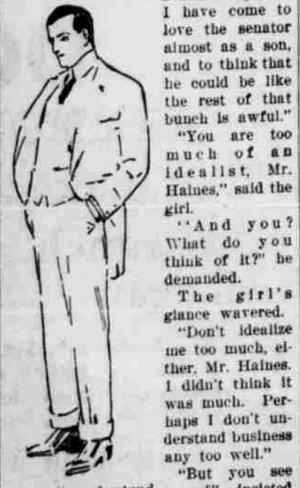
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"I can go back to newspaper work," she said.



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