

A GENTLEMAN FROM MISSISSIPPI

By THOMAS A. WISE

Novelized From the Play by Frederick R. Toombs

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(CHAPTER XXVII Continued.)

The hero of Crawfordsville tried to speak, but he could not. He stared at his hostess, who smiled the smile of the budding debutante. His own open mouthed astonishment was reflected in the faces of Carolina and Hope Georgia as they observed their father's expression. He forgot he was in Washington. He did not know he was a senator. The fact that he had ever even thought of making a speech was further from his mind.

What did it all mean? Had Mrs. Spangler gone suddenly insane? His



"Great heavens! I'm late, I'm late!"

laughters—what did they think? These thoughts surged through his flustered brain. Then it flashed over him—she was joking in some new fashionable way. He turned toward the fair widow to laugh, but her face was losing its smile. A pained expression, a suggestion of intense suffering, appeared in her face.

"Why do you so hesitate, Senator Langdon?" she finally asked in low voice, just loud enough for the two girls to overhear.

The junior senator from Mississippi looked at his hostess. She had entertained him and had done much for his daughters in Washington. She was alone in the world—a widow. He felt that he could not shame her before Carolina and Hope Georgia. His southern civility would not permit that. Then, too, she was a most charming person and the thought, "Why not—why not take her at her word?" crept into his mind.

"Yes, father, why do you hesitate?" asked Carolina.

Senator Langdon mustered his voice into service at last.

"I've been thinking," he said slowly, "that—"

"That your daughters did not know," interrupted Mrs. Spangler, "of our—"

"The telephone—updates—is ringing," said a maid who had entered to Mrs. Spangler.

The adventuress could not leave the senator and his daughters alone, though she knew it must be Peabody calling her. At any moment he might remember his speech and leave. Already late, he would still be later, though, because he would have no carriage—hers would purposely be delayed.

"Tell the person speaking that you are empowered to bring me any message—that I cannot leave the dining hall," she said to the maid.

To gain time and to hold the senator's attention Mrs. Spangler asked slowly: "Well, senator, what was it that you were going to say when I interrupted you a few moments ago?"

Langdon had been racking his brain for some inspiration that would enable him to save the feelings of his hostess and yet indicate his position clearly. He would not commit himself in any way. He would pump up and pronounce her an impostor first.

After a moment of silence his clouded face cleared.

"Mrs. Spangler," he began, "your announcement today I have considered to be—"

"Furniture," she suggested.

"No," she returned.

"Mr. Wall says Senator Langdon is wanted at once at the capitol."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Langdon, springing to his feet and glancing at the clock. "I'm late, I'm late! I hope to God I'm not too late!"

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"Mr. Wall says a carriage is coming for Senator Langdon," concluded the maid.

"We must talk this matter over some other time, Mrs. Spangler," the Mississippiian cried as he sent a servant for his hat and coat. "I hope that carriage hurries, else I'll try it on the run for the capitol."

"It's a half hour away on foot," said Mrs. Spangler. "Better wait. You'll save time."

But to herself she muttered as though mystified:

"I wonder why Peabody changed his mind so suddenly? Why should he now want the old fool at the capitol? The rumble of wheels was heard outside.

"Hurry, father," cried Hope Georgia. The senator hurried down the stone steps of Mrs. Spangler's residence as rapidly as his weight and the excitement under which he labored would permit.

Opening the coach door, he plunged inside—to come face to face with Bud Haines, who had huddled down in a corner to avoid observation.

"Struggling to regain his breath, the senator cried:

"Well, what are—"

"Never mind now. But first gather in all I say, senator, as we've no time to lose. When I couldn't locate you and I saw you probably wouldn't be at the senate chamber in time to make your speech on the naval base bill I persuaded Senator Milbank of Arkansas to rise and make a speech on the currency question, which subject was in order. He was under obligation to me for some important information I once obtained for him, and he consented to keep the floor until you arrived, though he knew he would earn the vengeance of Peabody. That was over an hour and a half ago. He must be reading quotations from 'Pilgrim's Progress' to the senate by now to keep the floor."

Bud paused to look at his watch. The senator stretched his head out of the window and cried, "Drive faster!"

"Get your speech all right?" called Bud above the din of the rattling wheels.

"Yes, he—" was the response, the senator tapping his tunic breast pocket.

"Then it's marjoe she—" cried Bud, jerking his head back in the direction from which they had come.

The Mississippiian shook his head negatively and set his jaws determinedly.

The coach swung up to the capitol entrance.

"Tell me," asked Langdon, as both jumped out, "how did you find out that—"

"I phoned the house—gave a name Peabody uses."

"Great heavens, but how did you know where to phone?"

They were at the door of the senate chamber.

"Norton gave me the tip—for your sake and Carolina's—for old time's sake, he said," was Bud's reply.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE FLOOR OF THE SENATE.

TOO much occupied in concentrating his thoughts on his speech, Langdon failed to notice the commotion on the faces of Peabody and Stevens as he walked to his seat in the senate. They had fallen to succeed in getting Milbank to conclude and consequently could not push the naval base report through. But they noted the passing of over an hour after their opponent's appointed time and had felt certain that he would not appear at all.

"The boss of the senate" leaned across to Stevens and whispered hurriedly:

"We must tear him to pieces now—discredit him publicly. It's his own fault. Our agents can sell the land to Standard Steel. Our connection with the scheme will be impossible to discover—after we have made the public believe Langdon is a crook."

"But how about our supposed connection to prove the government that Langdon will tell about?" asked Stevens. "We can't deny that, of course."

"No," answered Peabody. "We can't deny it, but we will not affirm it. We will tell interviewers that we prefer not to talk about it."

"It's our only chance," replied Stevens enthusiastically.

"Yes, and we owe it all to Jake Stielhart," went on Peabody. "That

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The scarcity of harvest hands on the New Pecos plateau encouraged the laborers to demand a 10 hour harvest day.

The Oregon Trunk, building up the Beaches, is owned by John F. Stevens, backed by J. J. Hill. Stevens was formerly chief engineer of the Panama canal and is a trusted adviser of Hill.

The Reclamation irrigation convention has passed. It asks Congress for only \$50,000,000 to add irrigation. The five million dollar resolution was adopted.

"I therefore offer this resolution providing for the appointment of an investigating committee to look into these charges."

Langdon was intensely excited over this new development. "Some one has learned something about Peabody or Stevens," he mused. He feared that this new development might in some way affect the fate of the naval base—that the senate, and Mississippi, might lose it. He rose slowly in his seat, while the senate buzzed with the murmur of suppressed voices.

"I ask for more details information," he began when recognized and after the president of the senate had pointed with the gavel to restore quiet, "so that this house can consider this important matter more intelligently."

Senator Horton rose. He said: "I will take the liberty of adding that the senator named in name other than the junior senator from Mississippi."

Langdon's eyes blazed. He strode swiftly into the aisle.

"Mr. President," he cried passionately, "I know this is not the time or place for a discussion like this, but ask that senatorial courtesy permit me to ask—then he concluded abruptly before he could be stopped—"What is the evidence in support of this proposition charge?"

"This is all out of order," said the presiding officer after a pause, "but in view of the circumstances I will entertain a motion to suspend the rules."

This motion pending, Horton replied to Langdon.

"Your name is signed to a contract with J. D. Telfer, mayor of Gulf City, Miss., calling for 3,000 shares in the Gulf City Land company, and—"

"A lie, a lie!" screamed Langdon.

"That official," went on Horton coolly, "is now in Washington. He has the contract and will swear to conversations with you and your secretary. His testimony will be corroborated by no less a personage than Congressman Norton of your own district, who says you asked him to conduct part of the negotiations."

"And I might add," cried Horton, "that it is known to more than one member of this honorable body that you had drawn up a minority report in favor of Gulf City because of your anger at the defeat of your plan to take the naval base away from Altona."

Langdon sank into his chair, bewildered, even stunned. There was a conspiracy against him, but how could he prove it? The ground seemed crumbling from under him—not even a straw to grasp. Then the old fighting blood that carried him along in Benuegard's van raged at the valves of his heart, revived his spirit, ran through his veins. He leaped to his feet.

A sudden as of a scuffle—a body falling heavily—drew all eyes from Langdon to the rear of the main aisle. An assistant sergeant at arms was lying face downward on the carpet. Another was vainly trying to hold back Bud Haines, who, tearing himself free, rushed down to his chief wailing a sheet of paper to the senator's eyes.

"Read that," gasped the secretary breathlessly, and he hurried away up a side passageway and out to reach

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start and forget that I ever went to Washington."

Langdon paused deliberately. The senate was hushed. The galleries were still. Not even the rustle of a sheet of paper was heard in the reporters' gallery. The Mississippiian gazed around the senate chamber. He saw Stevens and Peabody craning their necks across the aisle and talking excitedly to each other.

Then he stepped forward and spoke, waving the paper in the air.

"This letter is signed 'Charles Norton.'"

The old southerner gazed triumphantly at the men who had sought to destroy him. It was with difficulty that the presiding officer could hammer down the burst of handclapping that arose from the galleries.

Senator Horton, however, was not satisfied with Langdon's sudden ascendency.

"How do we know that that letter is not a forgery, a trick," he exclaimed.

"Go get Congressman Norton—if you can—and get his denial," responded Langdon.

The junior senator from Mississippi hurriedly pushed his way out of the senate chamber. His day's work was done.

Down on a broad plantation along the Pearl river an old planter, who has borne his years well, as life goes nowadays, passes his days contentedly. He delights in the rompings of his grandchildren as they rouse the echoes of the mansion and prides himself on the achievements of their father, Randolph, who has improved the plantation to a point never reached before.

Sometimes he receives a letter from his daughter, Hope Georgia, now Mrs. Haines, telling him of her happy life, or perhaps it is a letter from Carolina, describing the good times she is having in London with the friends she is visiting.

And the old planter goes out on the broad veranda in the warm southern twilight, and he thinks of the days that were. He remembers how the Third Mississippi won the day at Crawfordsville. He thinks of the days when he fought the good fight in Washington. His thoughts turn to the memory of her who went before these many years and whom he is soon to see again, and peace descends on the soul of the gentleman from Mississippi as the world drops to slumber around him.

THE END.
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