

A GENTLEMAN FROM MISSISSIPPI

By THOMAS A. WISE

Novelized From the Play by Frederick R. Toombs

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CHAPTER IX.

A NEW KIND OF POLITICAL PARTNERSHIP.

THE combination of the forces of Langdon and Haines did not find much favor among the powers that are—at the capital, Senator Peabody peremptorily demanded an explanation from Stevens as to how he had allowed "his senator" to engage as his secretary "this inquisitive man Haines, a reporter who didn't know his place."

"Here we've put Langdon on naval affairs because we knew he didn't understand what's going on, and you, Stevens, supposed to be the finished product of the political mill, you fall asleep and let him take up a man whom nobody can control, one who knows the inside workings of Washington and who will take part in his pleasure in teaching your fellow Mississippian far too much for our good."

Stevens' reply, to effect that probably Haines would consent to be "taken care of" if judiciously approached, was derided by the observant Peabody. "A young reformer grows fat on notoriety," he laughed, "and think what a scandal he would have for his newspaper if we took a chance on disclosing our hand to him. No, no, Stevens, we must have him watched and try to discredit him in some way. Perhaps we can make Langdon believe that his secretary is dishonest."

Congressman Norton was another man who was dismayed at the formation of the firm of Langdon and Haines. Young Randolph, too, could not forget the defeat and humiliation he had previously suffered at Haines' hands and grew more bitter as the reporter's influence over his father grew stronger. But Haines' most effective enemy had arisen in the person he would be the last to suspect, one whom he unceasingly admired, one whose very words he had come to cherish. And possibly it was not all her own fault that Carolina Langdon had enlisted her services, subtle and quite overwhelming (owing to Haines' fervent worship of her) against the secretary. Perhaps the social system of which she had become a part in Washington had something to do with the craving to become a leader in that fascinating world whose dazzling variety and infinite diversion seemed to fill her soul with all that it yearned for. Love she had, for she had now promised to wed Congressman Norton. She loved him fondly; she had confessed to him, and gradually she came to work desperately against Haines, who, she had been convinced by Norton and Randolph, would prove a stumbling block to them, to her father, to herself in her career at the capital, if his influence over the senator should be permitted to exist or to increase. And so on the surface Carolina Langdon was most amiable to the secretary, encouraged him in his attentions to her, led him surely into her power, Norton having prevailed on her to keep the knowledge of their engagement secret from every one, even her father.

The days and nights became filled with important work for Senator Langdon and his secretary. Together they went over the important measures, outlined what appeared to be the best course of procedure and carried it into effect as far as possible. Langdon became a prominent figure in the senate, owing to his consistent support of measures that fitted in with the public policy, or what should be the public policy, of the nation. He had learned that the only practicable way to outwit or to cope with the members of the dominating machine, made up, he was surprised to see, of members of both the parties—the only two in Washington—was to oppose what the machine wanted with enough power to force it to grant him what he believed the public ought to have. He was described by some of the hidebound "insiders" on Capitol Hill as "the only brainy man who had fought the machine in thirty years."

At the home he had later established in Washington as preferable to the International hotel were frequently seen a small coterie of senators and congressmen who had become known to the sarcastic party bosses in both houses of congress as the "Langdon crowd," which crowd was admitted to be somewhat of a factor when it finally prevailed on the president to take over 11,000 postmasters from the appointment class and put them under the control of the civil service commission, resulting in the necessity of a competitive examination for these postmasters instead of their securing positions through political favoritism.

Those who did not know Langdon intimately suggested that "this fellow ought to be 'taken care of.' What in God's name does he want? A committee chairmanship? An ambassadorship for some Mississippi charcoal burner? A couple of federal judgeships for his friends? Well, whatever it is, give it to him and get him in with the rest of us!"

Again it was Peabody who had the deciding say. "There's only one thing worse than a young reformer, and that's an old one," he laughed bitterly at a secret conclave at his apartment in the luxurious Louis Napoleon hotel. "The

young one thinks he is going to live and wants our future profits for himself. The old one thinks he's going to die, and he's sore at leaving so much graft behind him."

Heads and hearts thinking and throbbing together, Langdon and his secretary, Haines, plodded along. They had learned to lean on each other, the young gaining inspiration from the old, the old gaining strength from the young. They loved each other, and, more than any love, they trusted one another. And Hope Georgia watched it all and rejoiced, for she believed with all the accrued erudition of eighteen years of innocent girlhood that Mr. Bud Haines was quite the finest specimen of young manhood this world had ever produced. How could he have happened! She was sure that she had never met his equal, not even in that memorable week she had spent in Jackson.

The passing weeks taught Haines that he was deeply in love with Carolina, and, though he had endeavored to keep the knowledge of this from her, her woman's intuition had told her his secret, and she stifled the momentary regrets that fitted into her mind, because she was now in "the game" herself, the Washington game, that ensnares the woman as well as the man and makes her a slave to its fancy. No one but herself and Norton knew how deeply she had "plunged" on a certain possible turn of the political cards. She must not, she could not, lose if life itself were to remain of value to her, and on her away over this secretary she was told it all depended.

A subject that for some unexplainable reason frequently lodged in Haines' mind was that of the apparent assiduity with which Mrs. Spangler cultivated Senator Langdon's friendship. For several years she had occupied a high social position at the capital, he well knew, but various indefinite, intangible rumors he had heard, he could not state exactly where, had made him regret her growing intimacy with the girls and with the senator. They had met her through letters of introduction of the most trustworthy and assuring character from people of highest social rank in Virginia, where the Langdons had many friends, but even so, Haines realized, people who write introductory letters are sometimes thoughtless in considering all the circumstances of the parties they introduce, and residents of Virginia who had not been in the capital for years might be forgiven for not knowing of all the more recent developments in the lives of those they knew in Washington. While not wishing to have the senator know of his intention, the secretary determined to investigate Mrs. Spangler and her present mode of life at his first opportunity, hoping the while that his quest would reveal her to be what the Langdons considered her—a widow of wealth, fashion and reserve who resided at the capital because the memories of her late husband, a former congressman of high standing, were associated with it.

Calling at the Langdons' house one evening in February to receive directions regarding important work for the next day, Haines was somewhat puzzled at the peculiar smile on the senator's face. Answering the secretary's look of inquiry, the Mississippian said:

"I've been told that I can name the new holder of a five thousand dollar a year position in the department of commerce and labor and that if I have no one in particular from my state to name—that that you would be a good man for the job. First I was glad for your sake, my boy, for if you wanted it you could have the position. But on thinking it over it seemed there might be something behind it not showing on the surface."

"It's a trick," said Haines. "Who made the offer?"

"Senator Stevens."

"I might have known," hotly responded the secretary. "There's a crowd that wants you and me separated. Thought this bait too much for me to resist, did they?" Then he paused, rubbing his fingers through his hair in a perplexed manner. "Strange, but it is, senator, that a man of your party is offered this desirable piece of patronage, entirely unsolicited on your part, from the administration of another, a different political party? Especially when that other party has so many hungry who'd be 'tax eaters' clamoring to enter the 'land of milk and honey.' I think Stevens deliberately—"

"There, there, Bud," broke in Langdon, "you mustn't say anything against Senator Stevens to me. True, he associates with some folks I don't approve of, but that doesn't necessarily mean

anything wrong, and a myself have always found him thoroughly honest."

"Yes," muttered the secretary, following the senator into the library, "you've always found him honest because you think everybody's honest—but Stevens is just the doctor who will cure you of this ailment, this chronic trustfulness."

Haines laughed softly. "When Peabody's little Stevie gets through hacking at the prostrate body of political purity his two banded sword of political corruption will need new edges."

Thus far neither the senator nor his secretary had suspicion of any questionable deal in regard to the gulf naval base. The rush of other events, particularly the fight over the reduction of the tariff, had pushed this project temporarily into the background so far as they were concerned, though the "boss of the senate" and his satellites had been losing no time in perfecting their plans regarding the choice of Altacoola as the site.

Peabody and Stevens had ingeniously exploited Langdon at every possible opportunity in relation to the naval base. Asked about new developments in the committee on naval affairs, the ready answer was: "Better see Senator Langdon. He knows all about the naval base; has the matter in full charge. I really know little about it."

So by hiding behind the unsuspecting old hero of Crawfordville they diverted from themselves any possible suspicion and placed Langdon where he would have to bear the brunt of the great scandal that would, they well knew, come out at some future time—after their foul conspiracy against the nation had been consummated, after the fruits of their betrayal had been secured.

What, after all, the schemers concluded, is the little matter of an investigation among senators to guilty senators who, deeply versed in the law, have destroyed every compromising document that could be admissible as evidence?

Why, the senate would appoint an investigating committee and investigate itself, would it not, when the ridiculous scandal came?

And what senator would fear himself, or for himself, as he investigated himself, when the blame had already been put publicly on some one else, some simple minded old soul who could go back to his cotton fields in Mississippi and forget all about it, strong in his innocence, even though shorn of reputation, and desire to live?

CHAPTER X.

WHEN SENATORS DISAGREE.

THE wisecracks of Washington had rightly predicted that the site of the hundred million dollar gulf naval base would be decided on in March after the excitement and gayety attending the presidential inauguration had subsided.

On the morning of the day before this action of the committee on naval affairs was to be taken Secretary Haines sat at his desk in Senator Langdon's committee room in the capitol. Richard Cullen, the favorite associate of Haines in his journalistic days, out earlier than usual on his daily round of the departments for news for his Chicago paper, had strolled in and attempted a few of his characteristic comments. Haines



"Better see Senator Langdon."

found them entertaining, but these were directed at Senator Langdon.

"Now, let me tell you something, Dick," the secretary answered firmly. "Don't you work off all your dyspeptic ideas in this neighborhood. My senator is a great man. They can't appreciate him up here because he's honest—crystal clear. I used to think I knew what a decent citizen, a real man, ought to be, but he's taught me some new things. He'll teach them all something before he gets through."

Cullen hung one leg over Haines' desk.

"You're a nice, quiet, gentlemanly little optimist, and I like you, old fellow," retorted Cullen. "But don't deceive yourself too much. Your Senator Langdon is personally one of the best ever. But he was born a mark, and a mark he'll be to the end of time."

"He looks good now. Sure, I like his speeches, and all that, but just wait."

When some of those old foxes in the senate want to put his head in the bag and tie it down, they won't have any trouble at all."

Smiling, Haines looked up at his cynical friend.

"The bag 'll have to go over my head, too," he said with a nod.

"Well, I don't know that Peabody 'd have to strain himself very much or get such an awful big bag to drop you both in, if it comes right down to that, old chap. You're making a mistake. You're as bad as your old man. You're a beautiful pair of optimists, and you a good newspaper man, too—it's a shame!"

After momentary hesitation Cullen continued, thoroughly serious.

"Bud, my old friend," he said in low tone, glancing quickly about, "there's one thing that you've got to put a stop to. It's hurting you."

The secretary's face showed his bewilderment.

"What do you mean?" he snapped abruptly. "Out with it!"

"I mean," replied Cullen, "that rumors are going around that you are keeping Langdon away from the crowd of 'insiders' in the senate for your own purposes—that, in short, you plan to 'deliver' Senator Langdon, guarantee his vote, on some graft proposition, so that I can get the money and not be himself. Consequently I'm tipping him off on what measures are honest, so that he'll vote for them, until—until I'm offered my price, then influence him to vote for some big crooked scheme, telling him it is all right. He votes as I suggest, and I get the money!"

"That's what 'delivering a man' means in Washington," dryly answered the Chicago correspondent. "It means winning a man's confidence, his support, his vote, through friendship and then selling it for cash."

"But you, Dick, you have—"

"Of course, old man, I have denied the truth of this, I know you too well to doubt you. Still, the yarn is hurting you. Remember that western senator who was 'delivered' twice, both ways, on a graft bill?" he laughingly asked the secretary.

"Should say I did, Dick. That is the record for that game. It was a corporation measure. One railroad wanted it; another opposed it. The senator innocently told an eastern senator that he was going to vote for the bill. Then the easterner went to the railroad wanting the bill passed and got \$7,000 on his absolute promise that he would get Senator X. to vote for it, who, of course, did vote for it."

"Yes," said Cullen, "and later, when Senator X. heard that Senator Z. had got money for his vote, he was wild. Then when another effort was made to pass the bill (which had been defeated) the 'delivered' senator said to Z. as he met him unexpectedly: 'You scoundrel, here's where I get square with you to some extent. Anyway, I'm going to vote against that bill this time and make a long speech against it too.' Senator Z. then hustled to

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