

A GENTLEMAN FROM MISSISSIPPI

By THOMAS A. WISE

Novelized From the Play by Frederick R. Toombs

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CHAPTER XII.

THE LURE OF A WOMAN'S LOVE

CAROLINA had come to find out from Haines, if possible, how her father was going to vote on the naval base and to induce the secretary to persuade him to stand for Altacoola—if there seemed danger that he would vote for another site. That was her scheme, for Carolina had put \$25,000 into Altacoola land, money left by her mother. Norton had persuaded Carolina to invest in the enterprise to defraud the government, promising her \$50,000 clear profit. How much she could do in Washington society with that!

The continued uncertainty over her father's final attitude had strained her nerves almost to the breaking, for the success of the conspiracy depended on his vote. Not even the words of Norton, her future husband, could reassure her. Her worry was increased by the knowledge of Randolph's investment of her father's \$50,000.

That Carolina must sacrifice Haines on the altar of her consuming desire for money, for a higher worldly position, was an unimportant consideration. He stood in the way. Any moment he might discover the existence of the Altacoola scheme, he would immediately tell her father, and she knew her father would immediately decide against Altacoola—the bright hopes of her future would turn to ashes. Norton's money as well as invested in Altacoola. He, too, would be ruined. She was sure that she loved Norton, but she could not marry a penniless man.

Carolina resumed the conversation. "It isn't anything so very important, Mr. Haines. It's about father."

Haines beamed. "I have the honor to report, Miss Langdon," he bowed, "that your father is making the very best kind of a senator."

The girl hesitated. "Yes; he might if he had some ambition."

"Don't worry! If he comes down to that, I have ambition for two. You want him to be a success, don't you? Well, he is the biggest kind of a success."

"I never believed that he would be," confessed the daughter. Haines laughed.

"Why, do you realize that today he is one of the most popular men in public life throughout the country; that 'What does Langdon think?' has become the watchword of the big body of independents who want honesty and decent government without graft?"

"I tell you that's a big thing, Miss Langdon. That's success—real success in politics, especially in Washington politics."

"Now, if there's anything else you want him to have, I'll see that he gets it. I'll try to get it for him"—he paused a moment, then added, with heartfelt meaning in his voice—"and for you, Miss Langdon."

Carolina played coquettishly with the secretary.

"For me, Mr. Haines?" she questioned archly, with an effective glance into his eyes.

Bud's pulses began to throb violently—to leap.

"Yes," he exclaimed unsteadily, "for you, and you know it. That's the inspiration now, my inspiration—the chance of winning your belief in me, of winning something more, the biggest thing I ever thought of win—because, Miss Langdon—Carolina—I love you." He bent over and seized the girl's hand.

"Ever since the day I first saw you!"

She shook her head indulgently and in a moment drew her hand from his.

"You mustn't be so serious, Mr. Haines. You don't understand south-

ern girls at all. We are not just like northern girls. We are used to being made love to from the time we are knee high. Sometimes I fear we flirt a little, but we don't mean any harm. All girls flirt—a little."

"But somebody wins even the southern girls," declared Haines eagerly. The girl's face became serious, earnest, sincere.

"Yes, somebody does, always," she said. "And when a southern girl is won she stays won, Mr. Haines."

"And I have a chance to win?" questioned the determined young northerner.

Carolina smiled sweetly and expressively.

"Who knows? First make my father even a bigger success—that's first. Oh, I wonder if you can realize what all this life means to me! If you can realize what those years of stagnating on the plantation meant to me! No man would have endured it!" she exclaimed bitterly.

"I am more of a man than a woman in some ways; I'm ambitious. From the time I was a little girl I've wanted the world, power, fame, money. I want them still. I mean to get them."

"I want power, fame, money, anyhow. If I can't get them myself, some one must get them for me."

"And love?" suggested the man. "You are leaving love out. Suppose I get all these things for you?"

Bud's pounding heart almost stopped. He could scarcely gain his breath as he saw creep into Carolina's eyes what he believed to be the light of hope for him, the light even of a woman's promise.

"Who knows, Mr. Haines? There's no reward guaranteed. There may be others trying," she answered.

Haines laughed—the strong, hopeful, fighting laugh of the man who would combat the boss of the senate on ground of the boss' own choosing.

"All right!" he cried. "If it's an open fight I'll enlist. I'll give them all a run. What are your orders?"

Carolina appeared indifferent. "I don't know that I have any particular orders, sir knight, except to see that my father does all he can for the Altacoola naval base."

Haines paused, seized by a sudden tremor. "The Altacoola naval base?" he stammered. "Well, all I can say is that the senator will do what he thinks right. That might bring power and fame—a right decision in this case—but it can't bring money."

Carolina shrugged her shoulders. "Money?" She laughed with affected carelessness. "Well, we'll have to let the money take care of itself for a time. But I do want him to vote for Altacoola, because I believe that will be the best for him. You believe in Altacoola, don't you?"

Haines hesitated, then answered: "Well, between the two sites merely as sites Altacoola seems to me rather better."

Miss Langdon held out her hand impulsively. "Then it will be Altacoola!" she cried. "Thank you, Mr. Haines. We are partners, then, for Altacoola."

The young man grasped her hand earnestly. "I'd like to be your partner for good, Carolina!" he cried.

They stood there close together, holding each other's hands, looking into each other's eyes, when the door opened and in came Charles Norton.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN OLD FASHIONED FATHER.

CONGRESSMAN NORTON was startled visibly at the sight of Carolina and Haines apparently so wrapped up in each other. Perhaps she was getting interested in the handsome, interfering secretary. That a woman sometimes breaks her promise to wed he well knew. Plainly Carolina was carrying things too far for a girl who was the promised wife of another.

Carolina and Haines showed surprise at Norton's entrance.

The congressman advanced and spoke sneeringly, his demeanor marking him to be in a dangerous mood. "Do I intrude?" he drawled deliberately.

Carolina drew away her hands from Haines and faced the newcomer.

"Intrude!" she exclaimed contemptuously, a tone that Norton construed as in his favor and Haines in his own.

"Intrude!" Haines laughed sarcastically, feeling that now he was leader in the race for love against this Mississippi representative, who was, he knew, a subservient tool and a taker of bribes. "You surely do intrude, Norton. Wouldn't any man who had interrupted a tete-a-tete another man was having with Miss Langdon be intruding?"

"I suppose I can't deny that," he re-

plied. The secretary smiled again. "I'll match you to see who stays," he said.

But Norton's turn to defeat his rival had come. He held out a paper to Haines.

"Senator Langdon gave me this for you. I reckon I don't have to match." The secretary opened the note to read:

"Where in thunder does that hydrate come from—South America or Russia? How much off on the tariff on the creature do we want? Come over to the committee room, where I am, right away. Say it's an urgent message and get in with a tip."

The secretary looked up, with a laugh. "You win, Norton. I'm off. Good-by." And he started on a run to the senator's aid.

Norton turned angrily on the girl as the door closed.

"See here, Carolina," he cried, "what do you mean by letting that fellow make love to you?"

Carolina Langdon would not permit rebuke, even from the man she cared for. She tossed back her head and said coolly:

"Why shouldn't I let him make love to me if I choose?"

"You know why," exclaimed Norton, his dark face flushing sullenly. "Because I love you and you love me!" And he seized her and pressed her to him. "That is why!" he cried, and he kissed her again and again.

"Yes, I love you, Charlie; you know that," Carolina said simply. She was conquered by the southerner's masterfulness.

"Then why do you stand for that whippersnapper's talk?" asked Norton perplexedly.

Carolina laughed. "Don't you see, Charlie, I have to stand for it? I have to stand for it for your sake, for Randolph's sake, for my own sake, for all our sakes. You know the influence he has over father."

"He can make father do anything he wants, and suppose I don't lead him on? Where's our project? I suspect a thing and let him go to father, and you know what will happen. Father would turn against that Altacoola scheme in a moment. He'd beggar himself, if it were necessary rather than let a single one of us make a dollar out of a thing he had to decide."

"You're right, I reckon, Carolina," said Norton dejectedly. "Your father is a real type of the southern gentleman. He hasn't seen any real money in so long he can't even bear to think of it. Somebody's got to make money out of this, and we should be the ones."

"We'd lose frightfully, Charlie, if they changed to Gulf City, wouldn't we?" said the girl apprehensively.

"Why shouldn't I let him make love to me?"

Why, I wouldn't be surprised if he'd even let one of you girls marry him if he wanted to marry you."

"We'd have something to say about that," Carolina laughed amusedly. "Do you think that Hope or I could ever care for a man like this fellow? Of course not. But do be careful, Charlie. This Altacoola business must go through right. It would be too cruel not to have it so. And then—"

"And then you and I'll be married at once, Carolina, whether your father likes it or not," ended Norton for her. "With Altacoola safe, we can do as we please, as between us we'll be rich. What does it matter how we get the money, as long as we get it?"

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he's getting too strong." "How can you do it?" she asked. "You know when father likes any one he won't believe a thing against him." Norton agreed sorrowfully. "That's right. Seems like the senator's coming to think more of this fellow than he does of his own family."



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CHAPTER XIV.
WHEN A DAUGHTER BETRAYS HER FATHER.

BUD returned to find Miss Langdon and Norton still in the room. New buoyancy, new courage, thrilled in his veins. He would give this congressman the battle of his life for this prize, of that he was confident.

"I have an engagement with Mrs. Holcomb, Senator Holcomb's wife," she said, "so I must hurry away, but I expect to be back to see father."

"I think I'll just wait," suggested Norton. "I have to see the senator as soon as possible, and he ought to return from that ways and means committee meeting pretty soon."

When Carolina had gone a slight feeling of constraint settled over the two.

"The senator's pretty busy these days with his naval base matter coming up, isn't he?"

"Yes; keeps him pretty busy receiving delegations from Altacoola and Gulf City and patting them both on the back," said Haines. "Had a man from Gulf City in this morning with some pretty strong arguments."

The secretary watched Norton keenly to note the effect of this hint in favor of Gulf City.

"Gulf City!" Norton sneered. "Shucks! Who'd put a naval base on a bunch of mud flats? I reckon those Gulf City fellows are wasting their time."



"Do I intrude?"

"I'm horribly afraid sometimes, Charlie. That's why I came here today. I wanted to influence Haines, to keep him straight. Is there any danger that they'll change? You don't think there is, do you?"

"Of course not, child. Stevens has got his money in, and Peabody. There are only five on the committee. It's bound to go through."

"Then why is father so important to them?" asked Carolina.

"It's past my understanding, Carolina. I don't see how he's done it, but the whole country has come to believe whatever your father does is right, and they've got to have him."

"And father is completely under the domination of this secretary," murmured the girl thoughtfully.

Norton nodded. "We've got to get rid of him, Carolina. That's all there is to it. He has to go! When it comes to bossing the senator and making love to you, too."

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