

A GENTLEMAN FROM MISSISSIPPI

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

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CHAPTER XVI.

A RESCUE IN THE NICK OF TIME.
LATER in that never to be forgotten day Bud Haines ventured back to his desk in the committee room, after first ascertaining that Senator Langdon would not return. Some of the senator's papers must be straightened out, and he wanted personal documents of his own.

The secretary regretfully, sorrowfully performed these final duties and found himself stopping at various intervals to try to explain to himself how he had been deceived in both the Langdons, father and daughter. To him neither was explainable. "I've known enough senators to know that I'd never meet an honest one," he muttered. "But as to women—well, there's too much carefully selected wisdom in their innocence to suit me."

This cynic, new born from the shell of the chronic idealist that was, suddenly was disturbed in his ruminations by a sound at the door. Looking up, he saw Hope Georgia Langdon standing shyly, embarrassed, in the main entrance.

"Mr. Haines," she said timidly. Bud jumped to his feet.

"Yes, Miss Hope Georgia." As the senator's younger daughter came toward him he noticed that she was excited over something, and for a newly made cynic he took altogether too much notice of her youthful beauty, her fresh, rosy complexion and her dancing, sparkling eyes. The thought occurred to him, "What a woman she will make—if she doesn't imitate her sister!"

"I couldn't let you go, Mr. Haines, without telling you goodby and letting you know that, no matter what the others say, I don't think there has been anything wrong."

Before Haines could reply the young girl rushed on excitedly. "That's why I came. I know father and Carolina won't like it—they won't think it's nice—"

"I couldn't let you go," but I wanted to say to you that I don't think one ought to believe things against one you've liked and trusted."

"You think one ought not," said Haines. "So do I, but in this case the proofs were very strong. What are you going to do when people you can't doubt pledge their word?"

The girl tossed her head. "Well, the only one's word I'd like to take would be the person accused. I know I'm only a girl, Mr. Haines, and I'm not grown up, but you've made a mistake. Do try to clear things up. Why don't you see father and talk to him? Please do, Mr. Haines."

Little realizing that the girl was speaking in his own favor, for he knew not the need for such speaking, he believed her to be defending her father. He grasped her hands impulsively.

"You have grown up very much since you came to the capital, haven't you?" he said. "And you are right, Miss Hope. I ought to have known even when the facts were against him that your father couldn't have been really crooked. He can't be."

Hope Langdon's face flushed indignantly. "Father crooked? Who said so? Who dared say that?" he exclaimed. "Why, they told me he had sold out on the Altacoola bill. They said he was trying to make money on Altacoola. That's why I quit."

The flame of anger still was spread on the girl's face. "They said that!" she exclaimed. "Then they lied. They said you were the crooked one. Why, father thinks you sold out on Altacoola. They said you were trying to make money on that navy yard."

"What! They said I was crooked!" Haines fairly shouted. He rushed around the desk and caught the girl by both hands. "I see it!" he cried. "I see it! There's something I'm not just on to. You thought it was I; your father thinks—"

"Of course," exclaimed Hope, quite as excited as he. "I couldn't believe it. That's why I came back to get you to explain. I wanted you to disprove the charge."

"I should say I would," cried the secretary. "I knew it, I knew it! They couldn't make me believe anything against you. I knew you were all I thought you. Oh, Mr. Haines, prove you are that for me!"

Then Hope Georgia abruptly stopped. She had lost her head and in the enthusiasm of the moment had revealed her real feelings—something she would never do presumably when she grew more wise in the ways of women.

She suddenly thrust Haines' hands from her own and stood staring at him, wondering—wondering if he had guessed. Strangely enough, under the circum-

stances, the girl was the first to recover and break the awkward silence. "Come to our house tonight, Mr. Haines. There's to be a dinner and a



Hope Georgia Langdon, girlish and vivacious.

musical, as you know, but that won't matter. No matter who says so, I promise you that you shall see father. There shall be an explanation."

"Thank you, Miss Hope. You don't realize all you've done for me," said Bud seriously. "It's a wonderful thing to find a girl who believes in a man. You've taught me a lot, Miss Hope. Thank you."

"Goodby, Mr. Haines. Come tonight," she said as she turned and hurried away.

Bud Haines stood looking after her thoughtfully. "What a stunning girl she is! I've seemed to overlook her, with the rush of events—and Carolina," he murmured softly. "We never were such very great friends, yet she believes in me. What a beauty she is!"

A messenger boy broke in on his musings with a letter for Senator Langdon marked "Important."

"Guess I'm secretary enough yet to answer this," he thought, tearing it open.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed as he read it. "Here's the chance to get to the bottom of this Altacoola proposition. It's from Peabody."

Haines read the following: Dear Senator Langdon—I am going to Philadelphia tonight. Urgent call from a company for which I am counsel, so I probably won't be able to confer with you regarding the committee's choice for the naval base. But I know you are for Altacoola and trust to do all you can for that site. I of course consider the matter definitely settled.

"This situation will enable Langdon to bluff Peabody and draw out of him all the inside of the Altacoola business—ought to anyway. Guess some Gulf City talk will smoke him out."

Haines rushed out and across the hall, to reappear literally hauling in a stenographer by the scruff of the neck. "Here, you, take this dictation—record time," he cried.

Senator Horatio Peabody, Louis Napoleon Hotel: You are going to Philadelphia tonight. I know, leaving the report on the naval base to me. I have just come on various aspects of the situation which make me incline very favorably toward Gulf City. I am looking into the matter and, of course, shall act according to my best judgment. That is what you will want me to do, I know. Sincerely yours,

WILLIAM H. LANGDON.

"I don't think Senator Peabody will go to Philadelphia tonight," laughed Haines grimly as he addressed the envelope, "and I think that when the senate hurries around to the Langdon house instead there will be more than one kind of music, more than one kind of food eaten—perhaps crow—before the evening is over."

Seizing his hat, Bud rushed to the door to look up a messenger.

"It's all in Langdon's hands now," he cried. "Here's where I resign my position as United States senator."

CHAPTER XVII. THE CONSPIRATORS OUTWITTED.

SENATOR LANGDON'S dinners had well won popularity in Washington. Invitations to them were rarely answered by the sending of "regrets." He had brought his old Mississippi cook from the plantation, whose southern dishes had caused the secretary of state himself to make the senator an offer for the chef's services. "No use bidding for old General Washington," said the senator on that notable occasion. "He wouldn't leave my kitchen, sir, even to accept the presidency itself. Why, I couldn't even discharge him if I wanted to. I tried to let him go once, sir, and the old general made me feel

so ashamed of myself that I actually cried, sir."

Peabody and Stevens were the dinner guests tonight, as they were to confer afterward with Langdon and settle on the action of the naval affairs committee regarding the naval base. The three, being a majority, could control the action of the committee.

Senator Peabody had finally postponed leaving for Philadelphia until the midnight train in order to be present, he assured Langdon as the trio entered the library. The girls, Norton and Randolph were left to oversee preparations for the prominent Washingtonians invited to attend the musicale to be given later in the evening.

Carolina and Hope Georgia were in distinctly different moods—the elder, vivacious, elated over the bright outlook for her future; the younger, cast down and wearing a worried expression. Norton and Randolph in jubilant spirit tried to cheer her and, failing, resorted to taunts about some imaginary love affair.

The courage of the afternoon, which had enabled her to speak to Haines as she had, was gone; girlish fears now swept over her as to the outcome of the evening. Haines had not come! Was he really guilty and had promised to come merely to get rid of her? Why was he late? If he did come, would she be able to have her father see him, as she had promised? If she failed, and she might, she would never see this young man again.

"If I looked as unhappy as you, Hope, I'd go to bed and not discourage our guests as they arrive," Carolina suggested. "Our floral decorations alone for tonight cost \$700, and the musical program cost over \$3,000. The most fashionable folks in Washington coming—what more could you want, Hope? Isn't it perfectly glorious? Why?"

"Mr. Haines is below, asking to see Senator Langdon," announced a servant, entering.

"Oh, I knew he'd come! I knew it! I knew it!" cried Hope Georgia in pure ecstasy, clapping her hands.

The three plotters turned on the girl in amazement; then they stared at each other.

"Mr. Haines!" ejaculated Carolina. "Haines!" exclaimed Randolph, hurriedly leaving the room.

"Haines!" sneered Norton. "We can take care of him. The senator won't see him."

Carolina caught the suggestion. "Tell Mr. Haines that Senator Lang-

don regrets that he cannot possibly receive him," she directed.

"Carolina!" There was a ring of protest and pain in Hope Georgia's voice as she darted out of the door after the servant.

"What's the matter with that girl?" asked Norton, trying to be calm. Carolina shook her head.

"I don't know. She's queer today. I believe she imagines herself in love with Mr. Haines."

"Aren't you afraid she'll make trouble?"

"You shall not, Hope," he cried. Hope Georgia struggled and pulled her arm free.

"I reckon I just got to do what seems right to me, Randolph," she exclaimed. "I reckon I've grown up tonight, and I tell you—I tell all of you—she whirled and faced them—there's something wrong here, and father is going to see Mr. Haines tonight, and they are going to settle it."

Norton alone was equal to the situation, temporarily at least. "I'll be fair with you, Hope," he said reassuringly, and she stopped in her fight to the hall door. "I'll take Carolina and Randolph in to see the senator, and we'll tell him Mr. Haines is here. Perhaps we had better tell the senator," Norton suggested, beckoning to Carolina and her brother. "Let Mr.

The other sister laughed contentedly. "Little Hope make trouble? Of course not. If she does, we can always frighten her into obedience."

The door reopened and Hope entered, followed by Bud Haines. The girl's head was high; her cheeks were red; her eyes glittered ominously.

"I brought him back, Carolina," she said coolly. "Father will want to see him. I know there has been some mistake."

"Yes," supplemented Bud, "there has been a decided mistake, and I must refuse to accept the word that came to me from Senator Langdon."

Carolina Langdon drew herself up in her most dignified manner. "I'm sorry, Mr. Haines, but you must accept it," she said.

"Exactly," seconded Norton. "Senator Langdon entirely declines to receive you."

"I don't trust anything you say, Congressman Norton, and I may say also that I recognize no right of yours to interfere in any affair between me and the Langdon family."

"Perhaps I can explain my right, Mr. Haines," Norton said coolly, stepping beside Carolina. "I have just had the pleasure of announcing to Miss Hope Georgia Langdon my engagement to Miss Carolina Langdon."

Haines, entirely unprepared for such a denouement, shot a searching glance at Carolina. She bowed her head in affirmation.

"So that's why you tried to ruin me!" he cried. "You're both from the same mold," turning from Carolina Langdon to Congressman Norton, then back to the girl.

They stood facing each other when Randolph Langdon returned. At sight of Bud Haines he started, stopped short a second, then came forward quickly.

"Mr. Haines, my father has declared that he will not see you, and either you leave this house at once or I shall call the servants."

Bud looked at young Langdon contemptuously. "Yes, I think you would need some help," he sneered, feeling in his veins the rush of red blood, the determination in his heart that had a few years back carried him through eighty yards of struggling Yale football players to a touchdown.

The senator's son drew back his arm, but the alert, confident look of the New Yorker restrained him.

"Mr. Haines, in the south gentlemen do not make scenes of violence before ladies."

The cold rebuke of Carolina cut into the silence.

Haines stood in perplexity. He did not know what to do or how to get to the senator. It was Hope who came to his rescue.

"I'll tell father you are here. I'll make him come, Mr. Haines. He shall see you."

With the air of a defiant little princess she started for the door.

"Hope, I forbid you doing any such thing," Haines exclaimed. "I'll tell father Mr. Haines is here," exclaimed her older sister, but the younger girl paid no attention. Randolph caught her arm.

"You shall not, Hope," he cried. Hope Georgia struggled and pulled her arm free.

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