

# A GENTLEMAN FROM MISSISSIPPI

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

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## CHAPTER III. (Continued.)

But not even Cullen could make Haines consider his views on the necessity of political regeneration to be ridiculous. His optimism could not be snuffed out, for he was a genuine believer that the natural tendency of humankind was to do right. Wrong he believed to be the outcome of unnatural causes. This quality, combined with his practical knowledge of the world and his courage, made him a formidable man, one who would one day accomplish big things—if he got the chance.

"You know you can't shut me up, Dick," was his response to Cullen's oratorical flight. "I'm going to have my say. I don't see why a senator shouldn't be honest. All I want them to do is to play a new game. Let 'em at least seem to be honest, attend to their business, forget politics. The country sends them here to work, and if they do the work the people really don't care a hang what party they belong to."

"Come out of it, Bud. Your brain is wobbly," yawned Cullen wearily. "I'll buy a drink if you'll quiet down. Let's be comfortable till this fellow Langdon appears." He caught his friend by the arm and in spite of protest dragged him off to the cafe just as young Langdon and Congressman Norton came down through the lobby.

Though but few years older than Randolph Langdon, Charles Norton had long exercised strong influence over him because of his wider experience in the world's affairs. Like his father, young Langdon had stayed close to the plantation most of his life, particularly after leaving school, devoting his attention to studying the business of conducting the family's big estate. Norton brought him the atmosphere of the big outside world he yearned to see even as did his sister Carolina, and he imitated Norton's manners, his dress and mode of speech. The congressman's habit of confiding in Randolph, a subtle compliment, was deeply appreciated by the lad, who unconsciously became a continual advertiser of Norton's many virtues to Carolina and to his father, all of which the congressman knew.

That Norton's political career was the outcome of Carolina Langdon's ambition to shine in gay society was known to his friends as well as his family, and his desire to win her place here where she could satisfy every whim had developed almost to a frenzy. Seeing evidences of Senator Stevens' vast influence, he did not hesitate to seek a close relationship with him, and the senator was clever enough to lead Norton to consider him his friend.

At the start of his political career Norton had higher ideas of honor than guided his actions now that he had become a part of the political machine that controlled his native state of Mississippi and of the bipartisan combination that dominated both houses of congress in the interest of the great railway and industrial corporations. Senator Stevens and other powers had so distorted Norton's view of the difference between public and private interests and their respective rights that he had come to believe capital to be the sacred heritage of the nation which must be protected at any cost. The acceptance of a retainer from the C. St. and P. Railroad company for wholly unnecessary services in Washington—only another way of buying a man—a transaction arranged by Senator Stevens, was but another stage in the disintegration of the young congressman's character, but it brought him just that much closer to the point where he could claim Carolina Langdon as his own. And opportunity does not knock twice at a man's door—unless he is at the head of the machine.

Norton, the persevering young law student who loved the girl who had been his boyhood playmate, was now Norton who coveted her father's lands, who boasted that he was on the "inside" in Washington, who was on the way to fortune—if the new senator from Mississippi would or could be forced to stand in favor of the Altacoola naval base.

His conversation with Randolph Langdon as Haines and Cullen saw them pass through the hotel lobby illustrated the nature of the Norton of the present and his interest in the Altacoola scheme.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't come in on the ground floor in this proposition, Randolph," he was urging the continuance of the conversation begun over a table in the cafe. "No reason why you shouldn't do it, my boy. Why, are you still a child, or are you really a man? You have now drafts for \$50,000, haven't you?"

"Yeah," agreed Langdon, chagrined at Norton's insinuation of youthfulness and anxious to prove that he was really a man of affairs. "I've got the fifty thousand, Charlie, but—but, you see, that's the money for improvements on the plantation. As father has put me in as manager I want to make a showing."

"You can't make it until spring," urged Norton. "The money's got to lie in the bank all winter. Now, why

don't you make a hundred thousand with it instead of letting it lie idle? Isn't that simple?"

The younger man's eyes opened wide, and his imagination, stimulated by the special brand of Bourbon whisky Norton had ordered for him, took rapid bounds.

"One hundred thousand! You mean I could make a hundred thousand with my fifty between now and spring?"

"Sure as a nigger likes gin," replied Norton confidently.

"How?" asked Langdon.

The young congressman leaned over confidentially.

"This is under your hat, Randolph. You can keep quiet?"

Langdon nodded eagerly.

"Then put it into Altacoola land."

"The naval base?" gasped Langdon.

Norton nodded.

"Now you've hit it. The government will select Altacoola for a naval base. Then land will jump way up to never

ment.

"Now that I've got the young fellow to sew up his old man's money in Altacoola land," he chuckled, "reckon Senator William H. Langdon won't see anything wrong with that same noble tract of universe when he comes to vote for the naval base. Senator Stevens will be pleased."

CHAPTER IV.

"JUST THE MAN WE NEED."

AS Bud Haines returned from young Langdon's room, where he had left the latter in bed, towel filled with cracked ice around his head, he saw two familiar figures standing in a secluded corner of the lobby. They were talking earnestly in a low voice.

"Whew!" whistled the newspaper man. "It must be something important that brings both the boss of the senate and Stevens of Mississippi here."

"Good afternoon, Haines. How are you?" Senator Stevens said cordially, as, looking up, he saw the newspaper man approaching. "Senator Peabody, you know Haines, don't you? The brightest young correspondent in Washington."

Senator Peabody of Pennsylvania, the leading power in the upper house, was a man of commanding character and of strong personality. The fact he used these attributes to advance in the senate the financial interests of himself, of Standard Steel and other commercial organizations met with very little protest in Washington. That he deserved the title frequently used in referring to him, "boss of the senate," none would deny who had knowledge of the inner workings of the senate and the various committees.

Senator Peabody was very affable to the reporters, especially to those of Haines' stamp, who had never accepted any favors from him and who opposed his methods. He aimed to win the friendship of these opponents by diplomacy—as he had found that reporters of the Haines sort could not be influenced by money. He considered a reporter who would take a bribe as a constructive, conservative member of society and frequently regretted that so many of the correspondents sent to Washington could not be bought nor had bills they wanted passed or defeated. He extended his hand to Haines as Stevens concluded and said warmly:

"Of course I know the representative of the Morning Star! How do you do, Haines?"

"I wonder if we're not all here on the same errand," suggested the newspaper man.

Senator Peabody appeared to be all candor.

"We came to call on Senator Langdon, Senator Stevens' new colleague," he said.

Bud Haines opened his eyes wide.

"By Jove, Langdon stock is going up when the chairman of the naval committee drops in to welcome him."

"You see, Langdon went in on a naval base platform," explained Stevens. "Our section of the south is red hot in favor of the government spending its naval base appropriation right there."

"Certainly," interrupted Haines, "but—"

"And, there being a vacancy on the committee on naval affairs," continued Stevens, whose dignity was offended by the reporter's interruption, "the friends of Senator Langdon are working to have him appointed on that committee, because he comes from the state where the naval base will be located and will, like myself, be more familiar with the availability of the various sites suggested than a man from another state."

Haines nodded.

"Yes, of course. What town's going to get it, senator?"

Senator Stevens paused judiciously.

"Well," he said, "Altacoola and Gulf City are the chief candidates. I suppose you had better talk to Langdon about it."

The reporter smiled.

"That's just what I came for, senator, but I have to go up to the war department now. When Senator Langdon comes will you be kind enough to tell him I want to interview him?"

Stevens bowed cordially.

"Indeed I shall. I'll tell him he's in luck to have the smartest young man in Washington on the job."

"All right," laughed Bud, "only don't make it so strong that he won't recognize me when he sees me. Good day." And he hurried away to keep a belated appointment.

"Clever boy," said Stevens as the newspaper man disappeared.

The boss of the senate agreed.

"Yes, only I'm not sure it's a good thing for a newspaper man to be too clever. Spoils his usefulness. Makes him ask too many confounded questions."

Stevens acquiesced, for it would never do to disagree with the boss.

"It's very kind of you, senator," he began, changing the subject, "to come with me to welcome the new senator from my state, my old friend and colleague."

An inscrutable smile—a smile, yet a cold one—accompanied Peabody's answer.

"I have always found, Stevens," he said, "that a little attention like this to a new man is never wasted, and I make it a rule not to overlook opportunities."

Again the senior senator from Mississippi acquiesced, and he laughed heartily at Peabody's keen insight into human nature.

"I think you'll like Langdon," Stevens remarked after a pause, "and you'll find him easy to deal with. Just put up any measure for the benefit of the south and Langdon will go the limit on it. Even a Republican majority doesn't mind a little Democratic support, you know. I think he's just the man you can use in this gulf naval base bill."

"You can swing him?" asked Peabody sharply.

Stevens drew closer to Peabody.

"I elected him, and he knows it," he chuckled.

The boss nodded.

"And it's likely that a man like Langdon, new to politics—a simple gentleman of the old school, as you describe him—might have considerable influence on opinion throughout the country."

Langdon's colleague grasped the arm of the senatorial dictator.

"He's just the man we want, senator. He's one of those old fellows you just have to believe when he talks. He'll do what I suggest, and he can make the public believe what we think."

"Then you guarantee him?" snapped the boss.

"Unreservedly, senator."

"All right," said Peabody. "He goes on the naval committee. That ought to be enough honor for a man who a year ago was growing cotton on an old plantation miles away from civilization."

"We have control now of all the land about Altacoola that can be used," said Stevens. "I have had Norton, the congressman from Langdon's district, working on it. There isn't a foot of land there which we do not now control under options, and," he added, with a chuckle, "the options were dirt cheap."

Peabody granted approvingly.

"There won't be any New York fortune in it, but it ought to be a pretty tidy bit," he said. "Now, if we could only get Langdon interested, directly or indirectly, in a financial way, that would clinch everything."

The senior senator from Mississippi shook his head.

"It's too risky. He's old fashioned, you know—has about as much idea about practical politics as—well, as we have of the Golden Rule. Fact is, he

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