

A Gentleman From Mississippi

By Thomas A. Wise
Novelized from the Play by Frederick R. Toombs

CHAPTER IV.

"JUST THE MAN WE NEED."

As Bud Haines returned from young Langdon's room, where he had left the latter in bed, a 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.

"Who?" whispered 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's 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.

"Clearer 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 seen 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 "Then you guarantee him?" snapped the boss.

"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 grinned 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—as about as much idea about practical politics as—well, as we have of the Golden Rule. Fact is, he

rather lives by that antiquated standard. That's where we get him. He owes everything to me, you see, so naturally he'll do anything I want him to. By the way, there's Norton now. Perhaps he can tell us something."

"Norton had been strolling about the lobby, hoping to be noticed. The fame had lured the moth, and it liked the manner of the singing. The congressman hurried precipitately across at Stevens' summons.

"I've been wanting to speak to you, gentlemen," said Norton, full of the good trick he had turned, "but I didn't like to interrupt you. I think I've done a big stroke for Altacoola today."

Even Peabody pricked up his ears.

"Yes," said both senators together, with a keen sense of the dramatic, the congressman let his next words draw out with full effect.

"I've got Senator Langdon interested—financially interested," he said. His two hearers exchanged a significant glance.

"How?" asked Peabody sharply.

Norton smiled shrewdly.

"Well, I just let his son invest \$50,000 of the senator's money in Altacoola land. That ought to help some."

Stevens stared in amazement at his congressman, his eyes threatening to bulge out of his head.

"What?" he gasped. "You got Langdon's money in Altacoola, through his son?"

"I sure have, senator," chuckled Norton. "He's in to the extent of fifty thousand, and I've promised that the fifty shall make a hundred by spring."

"I'll make three hundred thousand at least," snapped Peabody. "Norton, you've done a good day's work. By the way, a New York client of mine has a little business that I cannot attend to handsly. Doesn't involve much work, and a young, hustling lawyer like you ought to take charge of it easily. The fee, I should say, would be about \$10,000. Have you the time to undertake it?"

The congressman drew a long breath. His eyes beamed with gratitude.

"I should say I have, senator. Of course I won't interfere with any of my duties as a congressman."

Peabody smiled.

"Of course not, Norton. I see that your sense of humor is improving. If convenient, run over to New York the last of the week. I'll give you a card. My client's office is at 10 Broadway."

The ruler of the senate nodded a curt dismissal.

"Thank you, senator; thank you very much." And Norton bowed and left, nodding.

Peabody turned to Stevens.

"You see, even a congressman can

be useful sometimes," remarked Stevens dryly.

"Keep your eye on that young man, Stevens. He's the most valuable congressman we've had from your state in a long while. Does just what he is told and doesn't ask any fool questions. This was good work. Langdon's on the naval committee now sure. Come, Stevens; let's go to some quiet corner in the smoking room. I want to talk to you about something else the Standard has on hand for you to do."

Hardly had they departed from the lobby when resounding commotion at the entrance, followed by the rushing of porters and bellhops and an expectant pose on the part of the clerk, indicated that the new senator from Mississippi had arrived.

CHAPTER V.

THE BOSS OF THE SENATE INSPECTS A NEW MEMBER.

AN actor playing the role of a high type of southern planter would score a decided success by picturing the character exactly after the fashion of Senator William H. Langdon as he strode to the desk of the International hotel. A wide brimmed black hat thrust back on his head, a long black perfect in his mouth, coattails spreading out behind as he walked, and the "Big Bill" Langdon smile on his face that carried sunshine and good will wherever he went, he was good to look on, an inspiration, particularly in Washington.

Following the senator were Miss Langdon and Hope Georgia, leading a retinue of hotel attendants staggering under a large assortment of luggage. Both beautiful girls, they caused a sensation all of their own. Carolina, a different type from the younger, had an austere loveliness denoting pride and birth. A brunette of the quality that has contributed so much to the fame of southern women. Hope Georgia, more girlish and a vivacious blond, was the especial pet of her father and usually succeeded in doing with him what she chose.

A real senator and two such young women handsomely gowned seemed to take the old hotel back a score of years—back to the times when such sights were of daily occurrence. The ancient greatness of the now dingy International lived again.

"How are you, senator? Glad to welcome you, sir," was the clerk's greeting.

The general senator held out his hand. Everybody was his friend.

"Glad to meet you, sir; glad to meet you," he exclaimed. "Must make you acquainted with my daughters. This is Miss Carolina Langdon, this Miss Hope Georgia Langdon."

The two girls, with their father's idea of courtesy, shook hands with the clerk, who was not at all taken aback by the unexpected honor.

Hope Georgia was thoroughly delighted with everything, but Carolina looked at the worn and faded walls and furnishings with evident distaste.

"Oh, this is Washington," murmured Hope Georgia ecstatically, clasping her hands and gazing at a vista of artificial palms in a corridor.

"Ah, this is Washington," sighed the new senator contentedly as he gazed across a hall at the biggest and most gorgeous cigar stand he had ever seen or ever hoped to see—the only new thing added to the hotel since Grant was president.

"Truly magnificent establishment you have here, sir; magnificent," he exclaimed as an imitation big column came within his purview. "I remember my friend Senator Mosely speaking to me of it thirty years ago. Are our rooms ready?"

The clerk, hugely pleased, hastened to assure him that everything was in first class order, waiting.

"You better go up, girls, while I look around a bit and sort of get the hang of things."

"Yes, I think we had better look around a bit, too, before we decide, father," said Carolina affectionately. Her father patted her diplomatically on the arm.

"Now, don't you worry, Carolina. I see you think this place too expensive from its looks—too good for us. But I tell you the best, even this, isn't too good for you girls and your dad. Run away, and I'll come up and see you soon."

The new senator leaned his elbow on the desk, surveying the place.

"I understand this is a favorite haunt for the big men of Washington," he said.

The clerk eagerly agreed.

"Yes, indeed, senator; we have them all. Senator Peabody and Senator Stevens were here just a moment ago."

"Boy, and Senator Peabody and Senator Stevens and tell them I'm here."

"I'm glad to see you, Langdon; glad to see you," exclaimed Stevens, with an assumption of effusiveness. "I want to introduce you to Senator Peabody of Pennsylvania."

Peabody bowed, and Langdon held out his hand.

"I'm delighted to meet you, senator. This is a proud day for me, sir."

Peabody had put on his smoothest and most polished manner.

"I came especially to meet you, Senator Langdon," he said. "Although we are on different sides we may be interested in the same things. I hope we shall see a great deal of each other."

Langdon chuckled.

"That's mighty good of you, senator. I'm depending on you experienced fellows to put me through. Don't know much about this lawmaking business, you know. Raising cotton, arguing the government and losing cigars have been about the extent of my occupation for the last forty years, so I reckon I'm not much of a practical lawmaker."

"Oh, you'll learn; you'll learn quickly," assured Peabody. "With Stevens, here, for a guide you can't go wrong. We all look up to Stevens. He's one of the powers on your side. He's an able man, is Stevens."

The new senator from Mississippi gladly corroborated this.

"You're right, sir. A great man! I tell you, when he told that legislature what they ought to do, Senator Peabody, they did it. If it wasn't for Stevens I wouldn't be here now."

In mock protest the senior senator from Mississippi raised his hands.

"Now, now, Langdon, don't say that. Your worth, your integrity, your character and our old friendship got you the senatorship."

The old planter laughed gleefully.

"Sure, Stevens, I have the character and the integrity, but I reckon the character and integrity wouldn't have done much business if you hadn't had the legislature."

Clearly delighted, Peabody considered it certain that this new senator knew just the way he should go and would cause no difficulty. His keen sense of gratitude made him appreciate how he had been elected. Peabody literally beamed on Langdon.

"I hope we shall be able to work a good deal together, senator," he said. "I have the interests of the south at heart, particularly with regard to this new naval base. Perhaps we may be able to get you on the naval committee."

"Me?" laughed Langdon. "Well, that would be going strong! But I tell you I'm for the naval base."

"For Altacoola?" suggested Stevens. Langdon hesitated. Peabody and Stevens watched him as eagles watch their prey from the mountain crag.

"Well, it looks to me like Altacoola ought to be a fine site. But the actual place isn't so important to me. I tell you, gentlemen," he said in impressive seriousness, "with a man of your rank and standing, you should be able to get a better site than Altacoola."

"Come along, colonel! You can't sit here all day. Them chairs is for the guests in the hotel," the head porter was urging as he jerked the old man toward the door.

The Mississippi's fighting blood was instantly aroused at such treatment of a respectable old white man by negroes. His lips tightly compressed as he hurried to the rescue. He cried sharply:

"Take your hands off that gentleman! What do you mean by touching a friend of mine?"

The negroes stepped back amazed. "Sense me, senator, is this gentleman a friend of yours," the head porter gasped apologetically.

Langdon looked at him.

"You heard what I said," he drawled in the slow way natural to some men of the south when trouble threatens. "I'd like to have you down in Mississippi for about ten minutes."

The head porter turned quickly on his assistants and drove them away, shouting at the top of his voice:

"Get about you' wuk. How dare you interfere wid a friend of de senator's? I'll teach you to be putting yoh nose in where it ain't got no business."

The old man, astonished at the turn of events, came forward hesitatingly to Langdon.

"I'm very much obliged to you, sir," he said. "I'm Colonel Stoneman, an old soldier."

The Mississippi stretched forth his hand.

"My name is Langdon, sir—Senator Langdon of Mississippi. I am an old soldier too."

"Delighted, senator," exclaimed the seedy looking old man, taking the offered hand gratefully.

Langdon's easy method of making friends was well illustrated as he clasped his new companion on the back. Everybody he met was the Mississippi's friend until he had proved himself the contrary. That had been his rule through life.

"Come right over, colonel; have a cigar, sir." Then, as they lighted their cigars, he inquired, "What army corps were you with, colonel?"

"I was under Grant against the Tennessee," replied the old G. A. R. man. Familiarly with a senator was something new for him, and already he was straightening up and becoming more of a man every moment. Langdon was thoroughly interested.

"I was along the Tennessee under Beauregard," he said.

"Great generals, sir! Great generals!" exclaimed Colonel Stoneman.

"And great fighting, I reckon," echoed the Confederate. "You remember the battle of Crawfordville?"

The old Federal smiled with joyous recollection.

"Do I? Well, I should say I did: Were you there, senator?"

"Was I there? Why, I remember every shot that was fired. I was under Kirby, who turned your left wing."

The attitude of the northern soldier changed instantly. He drew himself up with cold dignity. Plainly he felt that he had the honor of his army to sustain.

"Our left wing was never turned, sir!" he exclaimed with dignity.

Langdon stared at him with amazement. This was a point of view the Confederate had never held before.

"Never turned?" he gasped. "Don't tell me that! I was there, and besides, I've fought this battle on an average of twice a week ever since '65 down in Mississippi, and in all these years I never heard such a foolish statement."

"What rank were you, sir?" asked the Union soldier laughingly.

"I was a captain that morning," confessed the southerner.

His old enemy smiled with superiority.

"As a colonel I've probably got more accurate information," he said.

"I was a colonel that evening," came the dry retort.

"But in an inferior army. We licked you, sir!" cried Stoneman hotly.

The Mississippi drew himself up with all the dignity common to the old Confederate soldier explaining the war.

"The south was never whipped, sir. We honorably surrendered, sir. We surrendered to save the country, sir, but we were never whipped."

"Did you not run at Kenyon Hill?" taunted Stoneman.

Langdon brought down his fist in the palm of the other hand violently.

"Yes, sir; we ran at you. I ought to remember. I got my wound there. You remember that long lawn?—He pulled off his hat and threw it on the floor, indicating it with one hand—'Here was the Second Alabama.' The hat of the old Federal dropped

business, yet there were able business men in the senate. Not one of them would, for instance, think of buying a site for a factory until he had investigated many possible locations and then selected the most favorable one. Why was it, he pondered, that the business of the great United States of America was not conducted on business lines?

He must study the whole question intelligently; that was imperative. He must have advice, help. To whom was he to go for it? Stevens? Yes, his old friend, who knew all "the ropes." Yet even Stevens seemed different in Washington than Stevens in Mississippi. Here he played "second fiddle." He was even obsequious, Langdon had observed, to Peabody. In Mississippi he was a leader, and a strong one too. But Senator Langdon had not yet learned of the many founts from which political strength and political leadership may be gained.

What he finally decided on was the engaging of a secretary, but he must be one with knowledge of political operations, one who combined wisdom with honesty. Such an aid could prevent Langdon from making the many mistakes that invariably mark the new man in politics, and he could point out the most effective modes of procedure under given circumstances. It might prove difficult to find a man of the necessary qualifications who was not already employed, but in the meantime Langdon would watch the playing of the game himself and make his own deductions as best he could.

The senator started toward the hotel desk to ask regarding the whereabouts of his son Randolph when his attention was caught by the sight of three powerful negro porters endeavoring to thrust outdoors a threadbare old man. The victim's flowing white hair, white mustache and military bearing received short shrift.

"Come along, colonel! You can't sit here all day. Them chairs is for the guests in the hotel," the head porter was urging as he jerked the old man toward the door.

The Mississippi's fighting blood was instantly aroused at such treatment of a respectable old white man by negroes. His lips tightly compressed as he hurried to the rescue. He cried sharply:

"Take your hands off that gentleman! What do you mean by touching a friend of mine?"

The negroes stepped back amazed. "Sense me, senator, is this gentleman a friend of yours," the head porter gasped apologetically.

Langdon looked at him.

"You heard what I said," he drawled in the slow way natural to some men of the south when trouble threatens. "I'd like to have you down in Mississippi for about ten minutes."

The head porter turned quickly on his assistants and drove them away, shouting at the top of his voice:

"Get about you' wuk. How dare you interfere wid a friend of de senator's? I'll teach you to be putting yoh nose in where it ain't got no business."

The old man, astonished at the turn of events, came forward hesitatingly to Langdon.

"I'm very much obliged to you, sir," he said. "I'm Colonel Stoneman, an old soldier."

The Mississippi stretched forth his hand.

"My name is Langdon, sir—Senator Langdon of Mississippi. I am an old soldier too."

"Delighted, senator," exclaimed the seedy looking old man, taking the offered hand gratefully.

Langdon's easy method of making friends was well illustrated as he clasped his new companion on the back. Everybody he met was the Mississippi's friend until he had proved himself the contrary. That had been his rule through life.

"Come right over, colonel; have a cigar, sir." Then, as they lighted their cigars, he inquired, "What army corps were you with, colonel?"

"I was under Grant against the Tennessee," replied the old G. A. R. man. Familiarly with a senator was something new for him, and already he was straightening up and becoming more of a man every moment. Langdon was thoroughly interested.

"I was along the Tennessee under Beauregard," he said.

"Great generals, sir! Great generals!" exclaimed Colonel Stoneman.

"And great fighting, I reckon," echoed the Confederate. "You remember the battle of Crawfordville?"

The old Federal smiled with joyous recollection.

"Do I? Well, I should say I did: Were you there, senator?"

"Was I there? Why, I remember every shot that was fired. I was under Kirby, who turned your left wing."

The attitude of the northern soldier changed instantly. He drew himself up with cold dignity. Plainly he felt that he had the honor of his army to sustain.

"Our left wing was never turned, sir!" he exclaimed with dignity.

Langdon stared at him with amazement. This was a point of view the Confederate had never held before.

"Never turned?" he gasped. "Don't tell me that! I was there, and besides, I've fought this battle on an average of twice a week ever since '65 down in Mississippi, and in all these years I never heard such a foolish statement."

"What rank were you, sir?" asked the Union soldier laughingly.

"I was a captain that morning," confessed the southerner.

His old enemy smiled with superiority.

"As a colonel I've probably got more accurate information," he said.

"I was a colonel that evening," came the dry retort.

"But in an inferior army. We licked you, sir!" cried Stoneman hotly.

The Mississippi drew himself up with all the dignity common to the old Confederate soldier explaining the war.

"The south was never whipped, sir. We honorably surrendered, sir. We surrendered to save the country, sir, but we were never whipped."

"Did you not run at Kenyon Hill?" taunted Stoneman.

Langdon brought down his fist in the palm of the other hand violently.

"Yes, sir; we ran at you. I ought to remember. I got my wound there. You remember that long lawn?—He pulled off his hat and threw it on the floor, indicating it with one hand—'Here was the Second Alabama.' The hat of the old Federal dropped

on the floor opposite the startled bellboy, who was trying not to appear frightened.

"This is the clump of cedars," he exclaimed.

Both, in their eagerness, were bending down over their improvised battle plan, their heads close together.

"And here a farmhouse beside your cedars," cried Langdon.

"That's where the rebels charged us," echoed the Union man.

Langdon brought down his fist again with emphatic gesture.

"You bet we charged you! The Third Mississippi charged you! I charged you, sir!"