



# **THE SINS OF THE FATHER, New Edition: A Romance of the South**

*Thomas Dixon*

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Within a week Norton bitterly regretted the arrangement he had made with Cleo. Not because she had failed to do her work properly, but precisely because she was doing it so well. She had apparently made it the sole object of her daily thought and the only task to which she devoted her time. He couldn't accustom his mind to the extraordinary neatness with which she kept the office. The clean floor, the careful arrangement of the chairs, the neat piles of exchanges laid on a table she had placed beside his desk, and the vase of fresh flowers he found each morning, were constant reminders of her personality which piqued his curiosity and disturbed his poise. He had told her to come at seven every morning. It was his habit to reach the office and begin reading the exchanges by eight-thirty and he had not expected to encounter her there. She had always managed, however, to linger over her morning tasks until his arrival, and never failed to greet him pleasantly and ask if there were anything else she could do. She also insisted on coming at noon to fill his pitcher and again just before supper to change the water in the vase of flowers. At this last call she always tried to engage him in a few words of small talk. At first this program made no impression on his busy brain except that she was trying to prove her value as a servant. Gradually, however, he began to notice that her dresses were cut with remarkable neatness for a girl of her position and that she showed a rare talent in selecting materials becoming to her creamy yellow skin and curling red hair. He observed, too, that she had acquired the habit of hanging about his desk when finishing her tasks and had a queer way of looking at him and laughing. She began to make him decidedly uncomfortable and he treated her with indifference. No matter how sullen the scowl with which he greeted her, she was always smiling and humming snatches of strange songs. He sought for an excuse to discharge her and could find none. She had the instincts of a perfect servant—intelligent, careful and loyal. She never blundered over the papers on his desk. She seemed to know instinctively what was worthless and what was valuable, and never made a mistake in rearranging the chaotic piles of stuff he left in his wake. He thought once for just a moment of the possibility of her loyalty to the negro race. She might in that case prove a valuable spy to the Governor and his allies. He dismissed the idea as preposterous. She never associated with negroes if she could help it and apparently was as innocent as a babe of the nature of the terrific struggle in which he was engaged with the negroid government of the state. And yet she disturbed him deeply and continuously, as deeply sometimes when absent as when present. Why? He asked himself the question again and again. Why should he dislike her? She did her work promptly and efficiently, and for the first time within his memory the building was really fit for human habitation. At last he guessed the truth and it precipitated the first battle of his life with the beast that slumbered within. Feeling her physical nearness more acutely than usual at dusk and noting that she had paused in her task near his desk, he slowly lifted his eyes from the paper he was reading and, before she realized it, caught the look on her face when off guard. The girl was in love with him. It was as clear as day now that he had the key to her actions the past week. For this reason she had come and for this reason she was working with such patience and skill. His first impulse was one of rage. He had little of the vanity of the male animal that struts before the female. His pet aversion was the man of his class who lowered himself to vulgar association with such girls. The fact that, at this time in the history of the South, such intrigues were common made his determination all the more bitter as a leader of his race to stand for its purity.

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