



# The Magnificent Ambersons

BOOTH TARKINGTON

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**SYNOPSIS.**

**CHAPTER I.**—Major Amberson had made a fortune in 1872 when other people were losing fortunes, and the magnificence of the Ambersons began then. Major Amberson laid out a 20-acre "development" with roads and statuary, and in the center of a four-acre tract, on Amberson avenue, built for himself the most magnificent mansion the Midland City had ever seen.

**CHAPTER II.**—When the major's daughter married young Wilbur, the neighbors predicted that as Isabel could never really love Wilbur all her days would be bestowed upon the children. There was only one child, however, George Amberson Minafer, but his upbringing and his youthful accomplishments as a motorist maker were quite in keeping with the most pessimistic predictions.

**CHAPTER III.**—By the time George went away to college he did not attempt to conceal his belief that the Ambersons were about the most important family in the world. At a ball given in his honor when he returned from college, George recognized Lucy Morgan, a stranger and the prettiest girl present, and got on famously with her until he learned that a queer-looking duke, with whom he had been poking much fun, was the young lady's father. He was Eugene Morgan, a former resident of Highbury, and he was returning there to create a factory and to build business carriages of his own invention.

**CHAPTER IV.**—Eugene was an old admirer of Isabel's and they had been engaged when Isabel threw him over because of some youthful indiscretion and married Wilbur, Minafer.

**CHAPTER V.**—While driving with Lucy next day, George allows the horse to get beyond control, and the animal crosses the cutter, spilling George and Lucy in the snow, unhurt, although George is greatly annoyed.

**CHAPTER VI.**—George reveals intense dislike of Morgan, whom he suspects of malicious designs on his uncle or grandfather. His aunt, Fanny Minafer, to his great astonishment, sharply rebukes him.

**CHAPTER VII.**—Home on vacation, George has a heart-to-heart talk with his mother, in which the state of the family finances and his father's falling health, both figures, George is optimistic as to both.

**CHAPTER VIII.**—Hearing rumors concerning Lucy and her suitors, in particular Fred Kinney, George urges her to consent to a formal engagement of marriage, but Lucy refuses.

**CHAPTER IX.**—George becomes annoyed at going with his mother to the opera with Eugene Morgan, and rightfully rebukes his Aunt Amelia for her remarks on the subject. His aunt, Fanny, is sympathetic but somewhat bewildered.

**CHAPTER X.**—The sudden death of his father, following graduation, recalls George from college.

**CHAPTER XI.**—Lucy and George talk of ideals of life, which they find surprisingly different, and part in something which very nearly approaches a quarrel.

**CHAPTER XII.**—At a dinner given by Major Amberson, at which Eugene Morgan is a guest, the state of the family finances and his father's falling health, both figures, George is optimistic as to both.

**CHAPTER XIII.**—About a year after his father's death, George becomes furious when his Aunt Fanny told him "people were talking" about Eugene and his mother.

**CHAPTER XIV.**—George makes a "scene" when he visits Mrs. Johnson, a family old neighbor, and is ordered from her home. His uncle, George, tells him he has acted foolishly and his mortification is complete.

**CHAPTER XV.**—George learns that Morgan has planned to take Isabel on an auto ride, and being this time half in love through worry over the false situation in which he imagines his mother is placing herself, he orders Eugene from the house when he calls.

**CHAPTER XVI.**—Isabel's only thought is for the happiness of George and she shows him Eugene's letter, a many expression of affection, and a plea that she come to him. George vehemently denounces the writer and his plan, and Isabel consents to sacrifice herself and part from Eugene.

**CHAPTER XVII.**

Having finished some errands downtown, the next afternoon, George Amberson Minafer was walking up National avenue on his homeward way when he saw in the distance, coming toward him, upon the same side of the street, the figure of a young lady—a figure just under the middle height, comely indeed, and to be mistaken for none other in the world—even at two hundred yards. To his sharp discomfiture his heart immediately forced upon him the consciousness of its acceleration; a sudden warmth about his neck made him aware that he had turned red, and then, departing, left him pale. For a panicky moment he thought of facing about in actual fight; he had little doubt that Lucy would meet him with no token of recognition, and all at once this probability struck him as unendurable. And if she did not speak, was it the proper part of civility to lift his hat and take the cut bare-headed? Or should the finer gentleness

man acquiesce in the lady's desire for no further acquaintance, and pass her with stony mien and eyes constrained forward? George was a young man badly flustered.

As they drew nearer George tried to prepare himself to meet her with some



George Tried to Prepare Himself to Meet Her.

remnant of aplomb. He kept his eyes from looking full at her, and as he saw her thus close at hand, and coming nearer, a regret that was dumfounding took possession of him. For the first time he had the sense of having lost something of overwhelming importance.

Lucy did not keep to the right, but came straight to meet him, smiling, and with her hand offered to him. "Why—you—" he stammered, as he took it. "Haven't you—" What he meant to say was: "Haven't you heard?" "Haven't I what?" she asked; and he saw that Eugene had not told her. "Nothing!" he gasped. "May I—may I turn and walk with you a little way?"

"Yes, indeed!" she said cordially. He would not have allowed what had been done; he was satisfied with all that—satisfied that it was right, and that his own course was right. But he began to perceive a striking inaccuracy in some remarks he had made to his mother. Now when he had put matters in such shape that even by the relinquishment of his "ideals of life" he could not have Lucy, knew that he never could have her, and knew that when Eugene told her the history of yesterday he could not have a glance or a word even friendly from her—now when he must in good truth "give up all idea of Lucy," he was amazed that he could have used such words as "no particular sacrifice," and believed them when he said them! She had looked never in her life so bewitchingly pretty as she did to-day; and as he walked beside her he was sure that she was the most exquisite thing in the world.

"Lucy," he said huskily, "I want to tell you something. Something that matters."

"I hope it's a lively something, then," she said, and laughed. "Papa's been so glum today he's scarcely spoken to me. Your Uncle George Amberson came to see him an hour ago and they shut themselves up in the library, and your uncle looked as glum as papa. I'll be glad if you'll tell me a funny story, George."

"Well, it may seem one to you," he said bitterly. "Just to begin with:

It is better to get Current printing than to wish you had.

when you went away you didn't let me know; not even a word—not a line—"

Her manner persisted in being inconsequent. "Why, no," she said. "I just trotted off for some visits. Don't you remember, George? We'd had a grand quarrel, and didn't speak to each other all the way home from a long, long drive! So, as we couldn't play together like good children, of course it was plain that we oughtn't to play at all."

"Play!" he cried. "Yes. What I mean is that we'd come to the point where it was time to quit playing—well, what we were playing."

"At being lovers, you mean, don't you?"

"Something like that," she said lightly. "For us two, playing at being lovers was just the same as playing at cross-purposes. I had all the purposes, and that gave you all the cross-ness; things weren't getting along at all. It was absurd!"

"Well, have it your own way," he said. "It needn't have been absurd."

"No, it couldn't help but be!" she informed him cheerfully. "The way I am and the way you are, it couldn't ever be anything else. So what was the use?"

"I don't know," he sighed, and his sigh was abysmal. "But what I wanted to tell you was this: when you went away, you didn't let me know and didn't care how or when I heard it, but I'm not like that with you. This time I'm going away. That's what I wanted to tell you. I'm going away tomorrow night—indeinitely. Lucy, this is our last walk together."

"Evidently!" she said. "If you're going away tomorrow night."

"Lucy—this may be the last time I'll see you—ever—in my life."

At that she looked up at him quickly, across her shoulder, but smiled as brightly as before, and with the same cordial inconsequence: "Oh, I can hardly think that!" she said. "And of course I'd be awfully sorry to think it. You're not moving away, are you, to live?"

"I don't know when I'm coming back. Mother and I are starting tomorrow night for a trip around the world."

At this she did look thoughtful. "Your mother is going with you?"

"Good heavens!" he groaned. "Lucy, doesn't it make any difference to you that I am going?"

At this her cordial smile instantly appeared again.

"Yes, of course," she said. "I'm sure I'll miss you ever so much. Are you to be gone long?"

He stared at her wanly. "I told you indefinitely," he said. "We've made no plans—at all—for coming back."

"That does sound like a long trip!" she exclaimed admiringly. "Do you plan to be traveling all the time, or will you stay in some one place the greater part of it? I think it would be lovely to—"

He halted; and she stopped with him. They had come to a corner at the edge of the "business section" of the city, and people were everywhere about them, brushing against them, sometimes, in passing.

"I can't stand this," George said, in a low voice. "I'm just about ready to go in this drug store here, and ask the clerk for something to keep me from dying in my tracks! It's quite a shock, you see, Lucy!"

"What is?"

"To find out certainly, at last, how deeply you've cared for me! To see how much difference this makes to you! By Jove, I have mattered to you!"

Her cordial smile was tempered now with good nature. "George!" She laughed indulgently. "Surely you don't want me to do pathos on a downtown corner!"

"You wouldn't 'do pathos' anywhere?"

"Well—don't you think pathos is generally rather fooling?"

"I can't stand this any longer," he said. "I can't! Good bye, Lucy!" He took her hand. "It's good bye—I think it's good bye for good, Lucy!"

"Good bye! I do hope you'll have the most splendid trip." She gave his hand a cordial little grip, then released it lightly. "Give my love to your mother. Good bye!"

He turned heavily away, and a moment later glanced back over his shoulder. She had not gone on, but stood watching him, that same casual,



She Had Not Gone On, but Still Watching Him.

cordial smile on her face to the very last; and now, as he looked back, emphasized her friendly unconcern by waving her small hand to him cheerfully, though perhaps with the slightest hint of pre-occupation, as if she had begun to think of the errand that brought her down town.

Lucy remained where she was until he was out of sight. Then she went slowly into the drug store which had struck George as a possible source of stimulant for himself.

"Please let me have a few drops of aromatic spirits of ammonia in a glass of water," she said, with the utmost composure.

"Yes, ma'am!" said the impressive clerk, who had been looking at her through the display window as she stood on the corner.

But a moment later, as he turned from the shelves of glass jars against the wall, with the potion she had asked for in his hand, he uttered an exclamation: "For goodness' sake, Miss!" And, describing this adventure to his fellow boarders, that evening, "Sagged pretty near to the counter, she was," he said. "I hadn't been a bright, quick, ready-for-anything young fella she'd 'a' flummoxed plum! I was watchin' her out the window—talkin' to some young 's'tety fella, and she was all right then. She was all right when she came in the store, too. Yes, sir; the prettiest girl that ever walked in our place and took one good look at me. I reckon it must be the truth what some you town wags say about my face!"

At that hour the heroine of the susceptible clerk's romance was engaged in brightening the rosy little coal fire under the white mantelpiece in her pretty white and blue boudoir. Four photographs all framed in decorative plain silver went to the anthracite's fierce destruction—frames and all—and three packets of letters and notes in a charming Florentine treasure box of painted wood; nor was the box, any more than the silver frames, spared this rousing finish. Thrown heartily upon live coal, the fine wood sparkled forth in stars, then burst into an alarming blaze which scorched the white mantelpiece, but Lucy stood and looked on without moving.

It was not Eugene who told her what had happened at Isabel's door. When she got home, she found Fanny Minafer waiting for her—a secret excursion of Fanny's for the purpose, presumably, of "letting out" again; because that was what she did. She told Lucy everything (except her own lamentable part in the production of the recent miseries) and concluded with a tribute to George: "The worst of it is, he thinks he's been such a hero, and Isabel does, too, and that makes him more than twice as awful. It's been the same all his life; everything he did was noble and perfect. He had a domineering nature to begin with, and she let it go on, and fostered it till it absolutely ruled her. I never saw a plainer case of a person's fault making them pay for having it! She goes about, overseeing the packing and praising George and pretending to be perfectly cheerful about what he's done. She pretends he did such a fine thing—so many and protective—going to Mrs. Johnson. And so heroic—doing what his 'principles' made him—even though he knew what it would cost him with you! And all the while it's almost killing her—what he said to your father! She's always been lofty enough, so to speak, and had the greatest idea of the Ambersons being superior to the rest of the world, and all that, but rudeness, or anything like a 'scene,' or any bad manners—they always just made her sick! But she could never see what George's manners were—oh, it's been a terrible adulation! . . . It's going to be a task for me, living in that big house, all alone; you must come and see me—I mean after they've gone, of course. I'll go crazy if I don't see something of people. I'm sure you'll come as often as you can. I know you too well to think you'll be sensitive about coming there, or being reminded of George. Thank heaven you're too well-balanced." Miss Fanny concluded, with a profound fervor, "you're too well-balanced to let anything affect you deeply about that—that monkey!"

The four photographs and the painted Florentine box went to their cremation within the same hour that Miss Fanny spoke; and a little later Lucy called her father in, as he passed her door, and pointed to the blackened area on the underside of the mantelpiece, and to the burnt heap upon the coal, where some metallic shapes still remained outline. She flung her arms about his neck in passionate sympathy, telling him that she knew what had happened to him; and presently he began to comfort her and managed an embarrassed laugh.

"Well, well—" he said. "I was too old for such foolishness to be getting into my head, anyhow."

"No, no!" she sobbed. "And if you knew how I despise myself for—ever having thought one instant about—oh, Miss Fanny called him the right name: that monkey! He is!"

"There, I think I agree with you," Eugene said grimly, and in his eyes there was a steady light of anger that was to last. "Yes, I think I agree with you about that!"

"There's only one thing to do with such a person," she said vehemently. "That's to put him out of our thoughts forever—forever!"

And yet, the next day, at six o'clock, which was the hour, Fanny had told her, when George and his mother were to leave upon their long journey, Lucy touched that scorched place on her mantel with her hand just as the little clock above it struck. Then, after this

(Continued On Next Page.)

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"Unprecedented domestic demand" is reported by the American Sugar Refining Co., and one reason for this demand is undoubtedly the relaxation of federal authority in the distribution of this food necessity.

The agreement between the Sugar Equalization Board, and Herbert Hoover expires Dec. 31, 1919. Legislation to extend the system of regulation which solved our war-time sugar problem is before congress.

Profiteers are about the only ones who could desire the defeat of a bill to insure American households a steady and reasonably cheap supply of sugar.

Members of the Sugar Refiners' National Committee say that resumption of zone control would relieve the present situation in a week. The charge that the domestic shortage is caused by excessive exports is met by the statement that actually about 100,000 tons have been exported, which is said to be about ten days' supply for the United States.

Other sugar shipments out of the United States were from purchases made by the British Royal Commission from the United States Sugar Equalization Board of a part of the last Cuban crop. This was refined in the United States for the allied governments.

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