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The Magnificent Ambersons

BOOTH TARKINGTON

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I.—Major Amberson had made a fortune in 1875 when other people were losing fortunes, and the magnificence of the Ambersons began then. Major Amberson had a 200-acre "development," with roads and stables, and in the center of a four-acre tract, on Amberson avenue, built for himself the most magnificent mansion the Midland City ever seen.

CHAPTER II.—When the major's daughter married young Wilbur Minsler the neighbors predicted that as Isabel could never realize her love Wilbur all her love would be bestowed upon the children. There was only one child, however, George Amberson Minsler, but his upbringing and his youthful accomplishments as a mischief 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 banquet given in his honor when he returned from college, George monopolized Lucy Morgan, a stranger and the prettiest girl present, and got on famously with her until he learned that a queer looking dicker at whom she had been poking much fun, whom she had called "Uncle Eugene," was the father of her father. He was Eugene Morgan, a former resident of Eugene, and he was returning there to erect a factory and to build horseless 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 Minsler. CHAPTER V.—George made rapid progress in his courtship of Lucy. CHAPTER VI.—While driving with Lucy, next day, George allows the horse to get beyond control, and the animal overturns the outfit, spilling George and Lucy in the snow, unhurt, although George is greatly annoyed.

CHAPTER VII.—George reveals intense dislike of Morgan, whom he suspects of financial designs on his uncle or grandfather. Isabel's aunt, Fanny Minsler, is his great astonishment, sharply rebuked him. CHAPTER VIII.—Home on vacation, George has a heart-to-heart talk with his mother which reveals the state of the family finances and his father's falling health, both figures. George is optimistic as to both. CHAPTER IX.—Hearing rumors concerning Lucy and her suitors—in particular, Fred Kinney—George urges her to consent to the former engagement of marriage, but Lucy refuses.

CHAPTER X.—George becomes annoyed at gossip which connects his mother's name with Eugene Morgan, and rightly rebukes his Aunt Amelia for her remarks on the subject. Aunt Fanny is sympathetic but somewhat bewildering. CHAPTER XI.—The sudden death of his father, following graduation, recalls George from college.

Isabel had a bright idea. "George! Instead of a tandem wouldn't it interest you to get one of Eugene's automobiles?" "I don't think so. They're fast enough, of course. In fact, running one of those things is getting to be quite an art on the cards for sport, and people go all over the country in 'em. But they're dirty things, and they keep getting out of order, so that you're always lying down on your back in the mud and—"

"Oh, no," she interrupted eagerly. "Haven't you noticed? The way they make them now you can get at most of the machinery from the top. I do think you'd be interested, dear." George remained indifferent. "Possibly—but I hardly think so. I know a lot of good people are really taking them up, but still—"

"But still what?" she said as he hesitated. "But still—well, I suppose I'm a bit old-fashioned and fastidious, but I'm afraid being a sort of engineer or mechanic or the like will appeal to me rather than the way you're going to get at it, but still it doesn't seem to me precisely the thing a gentleman ought to do. Too much overalls and monkey wrenches and grease! No; I believe I'd rather wait for September and a tandem, mother."

Nevertheless George sometimes consented to sit in an automobile, while waiting for September, and he frequently went driving in one of Eugene's cars with Lucy and her father. He even allowed himself to be escorted with his mother and Fanny through the growing factory, which was now, as the foreman of the paint shop informed the visitors, "turning out a car and a quarter a day."

From the factory Eugene took them to lunch at a new restaurant, just opened in the town, a place which surprised Isabel with its metropolitan air, and, though George made fun of her, in a whisper, she offered everything the tribute of pleased exclamations; and her gayety helped Eugene's to make the little occasion almost a festive one.

Her eyelids flickered, and then she looked up at him with a sad gravity, tears streaming just at the poised. "One reason's because I have a feeling that it's never going to be." "Why?" "It's just a feeling." "You haven't any reason or—"

"Well, if that's all," George said, reassured, and laughing confidently. "I guess I won't be very much troubled!" But at once he became serious again, adopting the tone of argument. "Don't you care enough about me to marry me?" She looked down again, pathetically, "Yes."

"Well, then, why in the world won't you drop the 'almost'?" Her distress increased. "Everything is—everything—" "What about 'everything'?" "Everything is so—so unsettled." "And at that he uttered an exclamation of impatience. "If you aren't the queerest girl! What is 'unsettled'?"

"Well, for one thing," she said, able to smile at his vehemence, "you haven't settled on anything to do. At least if you have you've never spoken of it." "As she spoke she gave him the quickest possible side glance of hopeful scrutiny; then looked away, not happily. Surprise and displeasure were intentionally visible upon the countenance of her companion; and he permitted a significant period of silence to elapse before making any response. "Lucy," he said finally, with cold dignity, "haven't you perfectly well understood that I don't mean to go into business or adopt a profession?"

"I wasn't quite sure," she said gently. "I really didn't know—quite." "Then of course it's time I did tell you. You know yourself there are a lot of people in the East—in the South too, for that matter—that don't think we've got any particular family or position or culture in this part of the country. There were one or two in my crowd at college; their families had lived on their income for three generations, and they never dreamed there was anybody in their class out here. I had to show them a thing or two, right at the start, and I guess they won't forget it! Well, I think it's time all their sort found out that three generations can mean just as much out here as anywhere else."

"But what are you going to do, George?" she cried. George's earnestness surpassed hers; he had become flushed and his breathing was emotional. "I expect to live an honorable life," he said. "I expect to contribute my share to civilization, and to take part in—in movements." "What kind?" "Whatever appeals to me," he said. Lucy looked at him with grieved wonder. "But you really don't mean to have any regular business or profession at all?"

"I certainly do not!" George returned promptly and emphatically. "I was afraid so," she said in a low voice. George continued to breathe deeply throughout another protracted interval of silence. Then he said, "Your father is a business man—"

"He's a mechanical genius," Lucy interrupted quickly. "Of course he's both. And he was a lawyer once—he's done all sorts of things." "Very well, I merely wished to ask if it's his influence that makes you think I ought to 'do something'?" Lucy frowned slightly. "Why, I suppose almost everything I think or say must be owing to his influence in one way or another. We haven't had anybody but each other for so many years, and we always think about alike, so of course—"

"I see!" and George's brow darkened with resentment. "So that if it is his father's idea that I ought to go into business and that you oughtn't to be engaged to me until I do." Lucy gave a start, her denial was so quick. "No! I've never once spoken to him about it. Never!"

George looked at her keenly, and he jumped to a conclusion not far from the truth. "But you know without talking to him that it's the way he does feel about it? I see." She nodded gravely. "Yes." George's brow grew darker still. "Do you think I'd be much of a man," he said slowly, "if I let any other man dictate to me my own way of life?"

"George! Who's dictating your—?" "It seems to me it amounts to that!" "Oh, no! I only know how papa thinks about things. He's never, never spoken unkindly or 'dictatingly' of you. Her face was so touching in its distress that for the moment George forgot his anger. He seized that small, troubled hand. "Lucy," he said huskily. "Don't you know that I love you?" "Yes—I do." "Don't you love me?" "Yes—I do." "Then what does it matter what your father thinks about my doing something or not doing anything? He has his way, and I have mine. Why, look at your father's best friend, my Uncle George Amberson—he's never done anything in his life, and—"

"Oh, yes, he has," she interrupted. "He was in politics." "Well, I'm glad he's out," George said. "Politics is a dirty business for a gentleman, and Uncle George would tell you that himself. Lucy, let's not talk any more about it. Let me tell mother when I get home that we're engaged. Won't you, dear?" (To be Continued Next Week)

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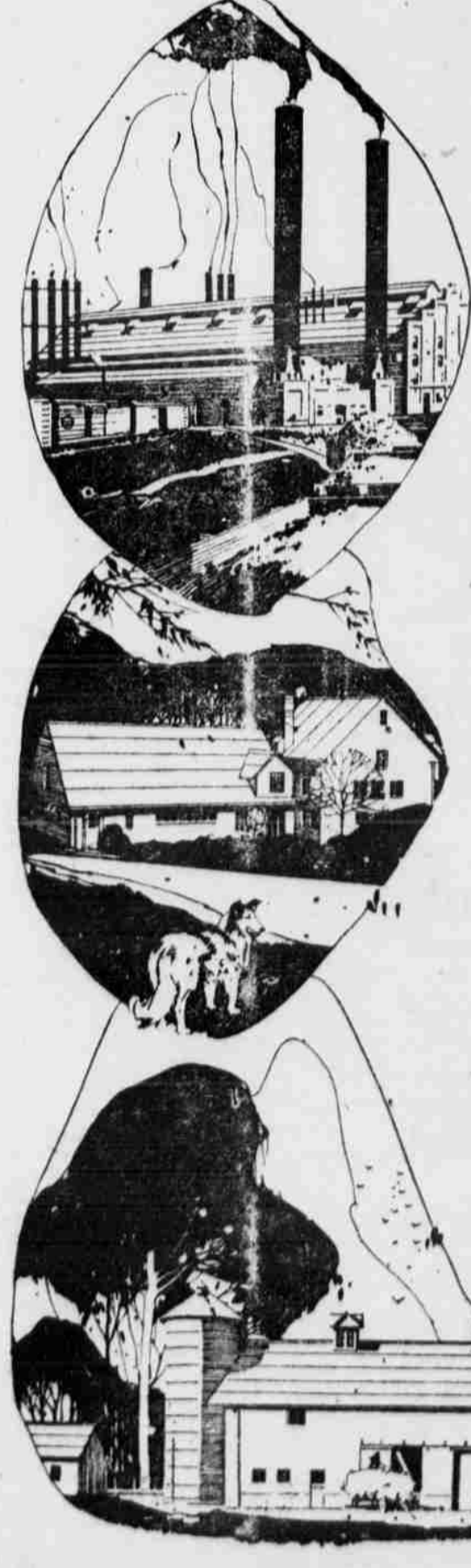
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