

# The Magnificent Ambersons

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

Copyright by Doubleday, Page &amp; Company.

"IT'S 'AU REVOIR' TILL TONIGHT, ISN'T IT?"

Synopsis.—Major Amberson had made a fortune in 1873 when other people were losing fortunes, and the magnificence of the Ambersons began then. Major Amberson laid out a 200-acre "development," with roads and statuary, and in the center of a four-acre tract, on Amberson avenue, but far off, if the most magnificent mansion Midland City had ever seen. When the major's daughter married young Wilbur Minafer the neighbors predicted that as Isabel could never really love Wilbur all her love would be bestowed upon the children. There is only one child, however. George Amberson Minafer, and his upbringing and his youthful accomplishments as a mischief maker are quite in keeping with the most pessimistic predictions. By the time George goes away to college he doesn't attempt to conceal his belief that the Ambersons are about the most important family in the world. At a ball given in his honor when he returns from college, George monopolizes Lucy Morgan, the stranger in the prettiest girl present, and gets on famously with her until he learns that a "queer looking duck" at whom he had been poking much fun, is the young lady's father. He is Eugene Morgan, a former resident of Bigberg, and he is returning to erect a factory and to build horseless carriages of his own invention. Eugene had been an old admirer of Isabel's and they had been engaged when Isabel threw him over because of a youthful indiscretion and married Wilbur Minafer. George makes rapid progress in his courtship of Lucy.

## CHAPTER VI.

The appearance of Miss Lucy Morgan the next day, as she sat in George's fast cutter, proved so charming that her escort was stricken to soft words instantly and failed to control a poetic impulse. "You look like," he said. "Your face looks like—it looks like a snowflake on a lump of coal. I mean a—snowflake that would be a rose-leaf too!"

"Perhaps you'd better look at the reins," she returned. "We almost upset just then."

George declined to heed this advice. "Because there's too much pink in your cheeks for a snowflake," he continued. "What's that fairy story about snow-white and rose-red—"

"We're going pretty fast, Mr. Minafer!"

"Well, you see, I'm only here for two weeks."

"I mean the sleigh!" she explained. "We're not the only people on the street, you know."

"Oh, they'll keep out of the way."

"That's very patrician chariotteering, but it seems to me a horse like this needs guidance. I'm sure he's going almost twenty miles an hour."

"That's nothing," said George; but he consented to look forward again. "He can trot under three minutes, all right." He laughed. "I suppose your father thinks he can build a horseless carriage to go that fast!"

"They go that fast already, sometimes."

"Yes," said George; "they do—for about a hundred feet! Then they give a yell and burn up."

Evidently she decided not to defend her father's faith in horseless carriages, for she laughed and said nothing.

The cold air was polka-dotted with snowflakes, and trembled to the loud, continuous jingling of sleigh-bells. Boys and girls, all aglow and panting jets of vapor, darted at the passing sleighs to ride on the runners, or sought to rope their sleds to any vehicle whatever, but the fleetest no more than just touched the flying cutter, though a hundred soggy mittens grasped for it, then reeled and whirled till sometimes the wearers of those daring mittens plunged flat in the snow and lay a-sprawl, reflecting.

But there came panting and chugging up that flat thoroughfare a thing which some day was to spoil all their sleighing merriment—save for the rashest and most disobedient. It was vaguely like a topless surrey, but cumbersome with unwholesome excrescences fore and aft, while underneath were spinning leather belts and something that whirled and howled and seemed to stagger. The ride-stealers made no attempt to fasten their sleds to a contrivance so nonsensical and yet so fearsome. Instead they gave over their sport and concentrated all their energies in their lungs, so that up and down the street the one cry shrilled increasingly: "Git a hoss! Git a hoss!"

"Git a hoss! Mister, why don't you git a hoss?" But the mahout in charge, sitting solitary on the front seat, was unconcerned—he laughed, and now and then ducked a snowball without losing any of his good-nature. It was Mr. Eugene Morgan who exhibited so cheerful a countenance between the forward visor of a deer-stalker cap and the collar of a fuzzy gray ulster. "Git a hoss!" the children shrieked, and gruffer voices joined them. "Git a hoss! Git a hoss! Git a hoss!"

George Minafer was correct thus far; the twelve miles an hour of such a machine would never overtake George's trotter. The cutter was already scurrying between the stone pillars at the entrance to Amberson addition.

"That's my grandfather's," said George, nodding toward the Amberson mansion.

"I ought to know that!" Lucy exclaimed. "We stayed there late enough last night: papa and I were almost the last to go. He and your mother and Miss Fanny Minafer got the musicians to play another waltz when everybody else had gone downstairs and the fiddles were being put away in their cases. Papa danced part of it with Miss Minafer and the rest with your mother. Miss Minafer's your aunt, isn't she?"

"Yes; she lives with us. That's our house just beyond grandfather's." He waved a sealskin gauntlet to indicate

confidence to yourself, but it's plain enough! I don't believe in that kind of thing. I think the world's like this: there's a few people that their birth and position, and so on, puts them at the top, and they ought to treat each other entirely as equals." His voice betrayed a little emotion as he added, "I wouldn't speak like this to everybody."

"You mean you're confiding your deepest creed—or code, what ever it is—to me?"

"Go on; make fun of it, then!" George said bitterly. "You do think we're terribly clever! It makes me tired!"

"Well, as you don't like my seeming 'quietly superior,' after this I'll be noisily superior," she returned cheerfully. "We aim to please!"

"I had notion before I came for you today that we were going to quarrel," he said.

"No, we won't; it takes two!" She laughed and waved her muff toward a new house, not quite completed, standing in a field upon their right. They had passed beyond Amberson addition and were leaving the northern fringes of the town for the open country. "Isn't that a beautiful house?" she exclaimed. "Papa and I call it our Beautiful House."

George was not pleased. "Does it belong to you?"

"Of course not! Papa brought me out here the other day, driving in his machine, and we both loved it. It's so spacious and dignified and plain."

"Yes, it's plain enough!" George grunted.

"Yet it's lovely; the gray-green roof and shutters give just enough color, with the trees, for the long white walls. It seems to be the finest house I've seen in this part of the country."

George was outraged by an enthusiasm so ignorant—not ten minutes ago they had passed the Amberson mansion. "Is that a sample of your taste in architecture?" he asked.

"Yes. Why?"

"Because it strikes me you better go somewhere and study the subject a little!"

Lucy looked puzzled. "What makes you have so much feeling about it? Have I offended you?"

"Offended' nothing!" George returned brusquely. "Girls usually think they know it all as soon as they've learned to dance and dress and flirt a little. They never know anything about things like architecture, for instance. That house was about as bum house as any house I ever saw!"

He spoke of it in the past tense, because they had now left it far behind them—a human habit of curious significance. "It was like a house meant for a street in the city. What kind of a house was that for people of any taste to build out here in the country?"

"From the family? What family?"

"Our family," said George, unperiphered. "The Ambersons."

"I see!" she murmured, and evidently she did see something that he did

the house Major Amberson had built for Isabel as a wedding gift. He frowned as they passed a closed carriage and pair. The body of this comfortable vehicle sagged slightly to one side; the paint was old and seamed with hundreds of minute cracks like little rivers on a black map; the coachman, a fat and elderly darky, seemed to drowsy upon the box; but the open window afforded the occupants of the cutter a glimpse of a tired, fine old face, a silk hat, a pearl tie and an astrachan collar, evidently out to take the air.

"There's your grandfather now," said Lucy. "Isn't it?"

George's frown was not relaxed. "Yes, it is; and he ought to give that trap away and sell those old horses. They're a disgrace, all shaggy—not even clipped, I suppose he doesn't notice it—people get awful funny when they get old; they seem to lose their self-respect, sort of."

"He seemed a real Brummell to me," she said.

"Oh, he keeps up about what he wears, well enough, but—Another thing I don't think he ought to allow: a good many people bought big lots and they built houses on 'em; then the price of the land kept getting higher, and they'd sell part of their yards and let the people that bought it build on it to live in, till they haven't hardly any of 'em got big, open yards any more, and it's getting all built up. The way it used to be it was a gentleman's country estate, and that's the way my grandfather ought to keep it. He lets these people take too many liberties: they do anything they want to."

"But how could he stop them?" Lucy asked, surely with reason. "If he sold them the land it's theirs, isn't it?"

George remained serene in the face of this apparently difficult question. "He ought to have all the tradespeople boycott the families that sell part of their yards that way. All he'd have to do would be to tell the tradespeople they wouldn't get any more orders from the family if they didn't do it."

"From the family? What family?"

"Our family," said George, unperiphered. "The Ambersons."

"I see!" she murmured, and evidently she did see something that he did

the house Major Amberson had built for Isabel as a wedding gift. He frowned as they passed a closed carriage and pair. The body of this comfortable vehicle sagged slightly to one side; the paint was old and seamed with hundreds of minute cracks like little rivers on a black map; the coachman, a fat and elderly darky, seemed to drowsy upon the box; but the open window afforded the occupants of the cutter a glimpse of a tired, fine old face, a silk hat, a pearl tie and an astrachan collar, evidently out to take the air.

"There's your grandfather now," said Lucy. "Isn't it?"

George's frown was not relaxed. "Yes, it is; and he ought to give that trap away and sell those old horses. They're a disgrace, all shaggy—not even clipped, I suppose he doesn't notice it—people get awful funny when they get old; they seem to lose their self-respect, sort of."

"He seemed a real Brummell to me," she said.

"Oh, he keeps up about what he wears, well enough, but—Another thing I don't think he ought to allow: a good many people bought big lots and they built houses on 'em; then the price of the land kept getting higher, and they'd sell part of their yards and let the people that bought it build on it to live in, till they haven't hardly any of 'em got big, open yards any more, and it's getting all built up. The way it used to be it was a gentleman's country estate, and that's the way my grandfather ought to keep it. He lets these people take too many liberties: they do anything they want to."

"But how could he stop them?" Lucy asked, surely with reason. "If he sold them the land it's theirs, isn't it?"

George remained serene in the face of this apparently difficult question. "He ought to have all the tradespeople boycott the families that sell part of their yards that way. All he'd have to do would be to tell the tradespeople they wouldn't get any more orders from the family if they didn't do it."

"From the family? What family?"

"Our family," said George, unperiphered. "The Ambersons."

"I see!" she murmured, and evidently she did see something that he did

the house Major Amberson had built for Isabel as a wedding gift. He frowned as they passed a closed carriage and pair. The body of this comfortable vehicle sagged slightly to one side; the paint was old and seamed with hundreds of minute cracks like little rivers on a black map; the coachman, a fat and elderly darky, seemed to drowsy upon the box; but the open window afforded the occupants of the cutter a glimpse of a tired, fine old face, a silk hat, a pearl tie and an astrachan collar, evidently out to take the air.

"There's your grandfather now," said Lucy. "Isn't it?"

George's frown was not relaxed. "Yes, it is; and he ought to give that trap away and sell those old horses. They're a disgrace, all shaggy—not even clipped, I suppose he doesn't notice it—people get awful funny when they get old; they seem to lose their self-respect, sort of."

"He seemed a real Brummell to me," she said.

"Oh, he keeps up about what he wears, well enough, but—Another thing I don't think he ought to allow: a good many people bought big lots and they built houses on 'em; then the price of the land kept getting higher, and they'd sell part of their yards and let the people that bought it build on it to live in, till they haven't hardly any of 'em got big, open yards any more, and it's getting all built up. The way it used to be it was a gentleman's country estate, and that's the way my grandfather ought to keep it. He lets these people take too many liberties: they do anything they want to."

"But how could he stop them?" Lucy asked, surely with reason. "If he sold them the land it's theirs, isn't it?"

George remained serene in the face of this apparently difficult question. "He ought to have all the tradespeople boycott the families that sell part of their yards that way. All he'd have to do would be to tell the tradespeople they wouldn't get any more orders from the family if they didn't do it."

"From the family? What family?"

"Our family," said George, unperiphered. "The Ambersons."

"I see!" she murmured, and evidently she did see something that he did

the house Major Amberson had built for Isabel as a wedding gift. He frowned as they passed a closed carriage and pair. The body of this comfortable vehicle sagged slightly to one side; the paint was old and seamed with hundreds of minute cracks like little rivers on a black map; the coachman, a fat and elderly darky, seemed to drowsy upon the box; but the open window afforded the occupants of the cutter a glimpse of a tired, fine old face, a silk hat, a pearl tie and an astrachan collar, evidently out to take the air.

"There's your grandfather now," said Lucy. "Isn't it?"

George's frown was not relaxed. "Yes, it is; and he ought to give that trap away and sell those old horses. They're a disgrace, all shaggy—not even clipped, I suppose he doesn't notice it—people get awful funny when they get old; they seem to lose their self-respect, sort of."

"He seemed a real Brummell to me," she said.

"Oh, he keeps up about what he wears, well enough, but—Another thing I don't think he ought to allow: a good many people bought big lots and they built houses on 'em; then the price of the land kept getting higher, and they'd sell part of their yards and let the people that bought it build on it to live in, till they haven't hardly any of 'em got big, open yards any more, and it's getting all built up. The way it used to be it was a gentleman's country estate, and that's the way my grandfather ought to keep it. He lets these people take too many liberties: they do anything they want to."

"But how could he stop them?" Lucy asked, surely with reason. "If he sold them the land it's theirs, isn't it?"

George remained serene in the face of this apparently difficult question. "He ought to have all the tradespeople boycott the families that sell part of their yards that way. All he'd have to do would be to tell the tradespeople they wouldn't get any more orders from the family if they didn't do it."

"From the family? What family?"

"Our family," said George, unperiphered. "The Ambersons."

"I see!" she murmured, and evidently she did see something that he did

the house Major Amberson had built for Isabel as a wedding gift. He frowned as they passed a closed carriage and pair. The body of this comfortable vehicle sagged slightly to one side; the paint was old and seamed with hundreds of minute cracks like little rivers on a black map; the coachman, a fat and elderly darky, seemed to drowsy upon the box; but the open window afforded the occupants of the cutter a glimpse of a tired, fine old face, a silk hat, a pearl tie and an astrachan collar, evidently out to take the air.

"There's your grandfather now," said Lucy. "Isn't it?"

George's frown was not relaxed. "Yes, it is; and he ought to give that trap away and sell those old horses. They're a disgrace, all shaggy—not even clipped, I suppose he doesn't notice it—people get awful funny when they get old; they seem to lose their self-respect, sort of."

"He seemed a real Brummell to me," she said.

"Oh, he keeps up about what he wears, well enough, but—Another thing I don't think he ought to allow: a good many people bought big lots and they built houses on 'em; then the price of the land kept getting higher, and they'd sell part of their yards and let the people that bought it build on it to live in, till they haven't hardly any of 'em got big, open yards any more, and it's getting all built up. The way it used to be it was a gentleman's country estate, and that's the way my grandfather ought to keep it. He lets these people take too many liberties: they do anything they want to."

"But how could he stop them?" Lucy asked, surely with reason. "If he sold them the land it's theirs, isn't it?"

George remained serene in the face of this apparently difficult question. "He ought to have all the tradespeople boycott the families that sell part of their yards that way. All he'd have to do would be to tell the tradespeople they wouldn't get any more orders from the family if they didn't do it."

"From the family? What family?"

"Our family," said George, unperiphered. "The Ambersons."

"I see!" she murmured, and evidently she did see something that he did

the house Major Amberson had built for Isabel as a wedding gift. He frowned as they passed a closed carriage and pair. The body of this comfortable vehicle sagged slightly to one side; the paint was old and seamed with hundreds of minute cracks like little rivers on a black map; the coachman, a fat and elderly darky, seemed to drowsy upon the box; but the open window afforded the occupants of the cutter a glimpse of a tired, fine old face, a silk hat, a pearl tie and an astrachan collar, evidently out to take the air.

"There's your grandfather now," said Lucy. "Isn't it?"

George's frown was not relaxed. "Yes, it is; and he ought to give that trap away and sell those old horses. They're a disgrace, all shaggy—not even clipped, I suppose he doesn't notice it—people get awful funny when they get old; they seem to lose their self-respect, sort of."