



Conducted by "ISOBEL"

## Miss Amy's Romance

By FLORENCE TINSLEY COX

Miss Amy Grant lived in the old-fashioned town of Meldrum, where spinsterhood is considered a disgrace. To be unwed at the age of thirty argues a serious lack of personal attractiveness. An unmarried woman of thirty is on the bazaar-counter, so to speak; at forty she is a remnant; at fifty—

But the mind refuses to dwell on the horror of a female Meldrumite of fifty who is unwed!

Miss Amy was thirty-seven. She had a neat figure, not too thin, and soft, black hair that rippled a bit. She had a nervous fashion of clasping and unclasping her hands, and when a man opened a door for her, or stood aside to let her pass around the great elm that blocked up the sidewalk at Meldrum's busiest corner, she had a way of saying, "Thank you, sir," with an appealing upward glance of her dark eyes, that was really very pretty. One or two of the older men, who had drifted away into the busy world and returned, after ten or twenty years of struggling, to find Meldrum quiet and placid, just as they had left it, had expressed rather a pleasant opinion of Miss Amy.

"She is so useful," one said, mindful of the recent struggle and turmoil.

"Why didn't she marry?" a bolder one asked.

All Meldrum laughed at the suggestion.

Why, no one had ever asked Miss Amy to marry! They had never thought of it.

Younger women and older women had married. Enterprising widows had carried off two, and even three, matrimonial prizes. Miss Amy had seen red-headed women marry, and cross-eyed women; and little Nellie Griffiths, poor child, who had lost her arm in a railroad accident, and wore a wooden substitute, had three offers in as many weeks. That was after the railroad company awarded her handsome compensation, but unsuspicious Miss Amy thought it was all love and romance, and quite glowed with pleasure when she heard of Nellie's final engagement.

"But there's something seriously wrong with me," she told herself that night as she shook out her hair before the glass. "I'm the only woman in all Meldrum who has never had an offer. The only one."

It hurt. The poor little pathetic face in the glass showed that it did. Nobody likes to fail, and to marry had evidently been Miss Amy's vocation. Her mother had raised her for it.

From the time she was five she had received good advice on how to manage a husband. "For one thing, you must never bring his slippers to him or wait on him," said Mother Grant. Many a good man has been utterly ruined simply by the way in which his wife toadied to him and carried his pigtail. Miss Amy, even when she wore pigtails, had thought, simpleton that she was, that she would rather like to fetch his slippers, but she had obediently laid away all her mother's decisions for future reference. But the time had never come for the exploitation.

It might have been her natural timidity, the clasping and unclasping of the nervous little fingers. Certainly the boys, and later the young men, never lingered by Miss Amy's side. They chose the bouncing red-headed girl in the games at school; they carried home, with rapture, the cross-eyed girl's books. They forgot Miss Amy. Her father died, and her managing mother died, and she lived alone in her little house. Sometimes she used to think how lonely some it was. To be alone! To be always alone! It was fearful.

The house was evidently meant for two. There were two armchairs, and two footstools, and two sofas. One of those double rockers which you see sometimes in girls' schools stood on the porch. Her female friends used to sit in it with her at the twilight hour, and, as they rocked, tell her

about their numerous love affairs. There was many a trouble poured into her patient, sympathizing ears, for she was the natural confidante of the whole village.

Afterward she would go into her house and think how nice it would be if there was only somebody to whom she could relate her troubles, some rough, masculine shoulder, smelling strongly of tobacco, on which she could cushion her tired head.

It was curious how intensely masculine she wanted him to be. When other women boasted to her of their husbands, how they never smoked or drank or swore, she would smile a faint, disparaging smile. She wanted hers to smoke, she wanted him to swear (in a righteous cause, of course), and she didn't think she'd mind if he drank a bit. Finer mental qualifications and the laws of retribution were unknown to her. She was the primitive woman, and she wanted the primitive man. But he never came, and she was thirty-seven.

It was in that same summer that Ida Mason made an unfortunate remark. Ida Mason was a widow just Miss Amy's age, and, in the usual way to widows, she was beginning to look about her a bit. She had almost settled on the man! He didn't know it as yet. It was mercifully concealed



Two Manitoba Jackies

from him; but that didn't matter. Ida Mason had a chalk-mark on him, and in her own good time would bring him to terms. She had gone as far as picking out the wedding dress.

"There's a gray silk with a purple flower on it in Thomas's window," she said. "It's a real neat pattern. I think Joseph would like it. But, my gracious, what does it matter whether he does or not?"

"If I were in love I think I'd like him to be pleased," Miss Amy suggested tentatively. "One does when one is in love."

Ida Mason looked at her in the twilight and laughed.

"Why, whatever do you know about love?" she questioned, a trifle contemptuously, speaking from the heights of her one and a half romance.

After that the double rocker didn't rock so evenly, and later Miss Amy excused herself to her visitor and went to bed. She had a bad headache, she said.

She didn't sleep much that night. She thought and thought. As a young girl she had prayed for a husband quite openly and trustfully, as a child might ask for a toy; now she prayed that the way might be opened before her. Her life was so narrow, so useless. There was nothing she could do in which she could take interest.

She was a survival of a class that is rapidly passing out of existence, the woman born and bred for one purpose—

marriage. She was a sweet specimen of her class. She had dear ways. She would have made any reasonable man happy if she had had a chance. But she had never had a chance.

The next day she examined the advertisements in the personal column of a certain New York Sunday paper. There were several attractive bargains offered with a naïveté almost equal to her own.

An able-bodied man aged forty-five wishes to meet a congenial member of the opposite sex. Tall, well-built, educated, and possessed of an ample income, and dark brown whiskers. Fascinating in manner. Prefers a brunette.

Miss Amy examined herself palpatingly in the glass. Was she a brunette? Would a tall, well-built, fascinating stranger, with whiskers, be struck by her charms at first sight? Merciful powers, suppose she wrote to him, and afterward—afterward she didn't wait! What had she to offer? Gentleness, gentleness equal to his own, perhaps, but nothing else. She hadn't the self-confidence of Ida Mason—the cheerful, bustling, important air of a widow. She looked used to rebofs. She blushed at her reflection in the glass. She looked small and thin and scared. She looked single!

She decided not to answer the advertisement; but she watched the column after that with much interest. She had an idea that, sooner or later, she would find what she wanted.

At last one day she saw an item of quite a different tenor.

"For adoption—A beautiful male child, aged sixteen months, who is motherless. Inquire at 1460 West Fifty-Seventh Street, New York City."

New York was over a hundred miles south of Meldrum—New York, with its Great White Way and its mighty rivers and bridges. It was the Mecca of the youthful, the promised land of the old. All her life Miss Amy had meant to visit New York. She had saved it up for her wedding trip—the wedding trip which had never come.

She hung over the advertisement. She pictured the child in her mind. Then she looked around her home.

It was a small house, but it had suggestive rooms. The window seats were just high enough for a child to scramble into; the cushions on the sofa were soft and silvery; there were two low steps from the piazza floor to the white path which led to the gate. The gate had a high latch, and a low bar of wood on the inner side where wee toes could rest comfortably. Down the street, within sight of the house, there was a small shop, with candy in the window. When you went to buy, a bell jangled mysteriously overhead. Miss Amy had hung on the gate, and Miss Amy had gone to the store in her own time. Now she saw another child walking in her footsteps.

She left Meldrum by the 1.43 that afternoon. She wore her best clothes, and a necklace made of the red seed-pods of some Indian plant which had been a present from a returned missionary's wife. She looked radiant, for a beatific composure seemed to have settled down upon her.

"It's the strangest thing I ever saw," Ida Mason said. "She's gone off—gone to New York all alone! She didn't want to talk about it. Do you know what I think? I think it's a man!"

"What!" somebody exclaimed.

"Well, it's easy to be seen that she's had experience. She's never said much, but I'm just sure she's been in love. Didn't she spend two weeks once when she was a girl with an aunt in Hackensack? There!"

It was all over the village by night that Miss Amy had gone to New York to meet a man! Everybody was astonished, and the youngest Thayer boy, who was brilliant and had, misquoted Macnlay on the occasion:

"To every woman on this earth love cometh soon or late," he declared solemnly.

Miss Amy, in her seat by the car window, had forgotten Meldrum. She was in a beautiful dream, rushing forward to its completion. That night she stayed at a quiet family place that called itself a hotel only by courtesy. The chambermaid buttoned her waist down the back for her in the morning, and gave her some advice about her hair.

"Get yourself one of them Roman braids," she counseled wisely. "All the ladies wear them. And a good rat. My, if you'd see yourself after you was pulled out a bit!"

She put her head on one side with the look of an artist.

"You ain't had-looking. You are just scrimped."

"Do you know where 1450 West Fifty-Seventh Street is?" Miss Amy asked anxiously.

"Ten blocks up and go across. Any cop will show you."

"Thank you very much," Miss Amy replied.

She glanced around the sunny room and at the wide bed.

"I may bring a small relative back with me," she added, with dignity.

The number was easily found. It formed one of an endless row of his brownstone houses, looking like a row of grim, coffins set upon end. It was distinguished from its mates by its general air of neglect. A sign in its paneled window showed that the house was for sale, and another sign on the front door offered the house for rent. The door stood partly open, exposing a dusty, uncarpeted hall and wide, gloomy rooms beyond. It was from one of these that Miss Amy heard, in answer to the bell, a strident voice roaring: "Come in!"

She went in. She saw a large, bare room, with just two pieces of furniture in it—a desk and a chair. A man was sitting at the desk writing. By his side there lay a revolver. Merry on us! You can imagine Miss Amy's state of mind—a strange city, an unfurnished house, a lonely room, a man, and a revolver! But still, after the first moment, she wasn't afraid, strange to relate. For one thing, the man had a nice face, a good, honest, friendly sort of a face, and in the corner there was a baby asleep on a faded quilt.

"I came in answer to an advertisement," Miss Amy said falteringly.

She clasped and unclasped her hands.

"I thought I'd like to adopt your little boy."

"Are you a mother?" the man asked in a deep voice.

It seemed to rumble through the empty room.

"No," Miss Amy confessed, faltering still more. "I'm—I'm single."

"But I hope that won't matter," she cried, taking courage after a miserable pause. "I'd—I'd be very good to him. Not having any ties of my own, he'd be my all, you see. I'd do my best."

The man got up and silently offered her the only chair. He was good to look upon when he stood up—tall, broad-shouldered, yet agile. He wore a rough tweed suit, and he hadn't shaved in a week or so.

"Sit down," he said.

He pushed the revolver farther away from her.

"Does that alarm you?" he asked.

"No," Miss Amy answered valiantly.

"I'm not afraid of things—except thunderstorms," she added upon truthful reconsideration, "and centipedes."

The man nodded.

"I suppose you live alone," he said, "in a little house in the country. You do your own cooking, and you make your own dresses. There's a lilac-bush by the back door, and a striped cat sits behind the stove, and on Sundays you teach a class in the Sunday School."

"Why, how did you know?" Miss Amy cried.

He put his head back and laughed, a big, boyish laugh. Then he tapped the front of his forehead, which projected.

"Causality," he said. "I'll tell you one thing more—you are lonely."

The tears rose to her eyes at that.

"I know you are lonely, because I am lonely myself," he confided. "Do you see this big house? Three years ago I moved in, a happy fellow. I had a young wife whom I adored. I had money in the bank. I held a fine position. Now the wife is dead, the money gone, and the business future has vanished along with the rest. The bottom has dropped out of my world. I was thinking some very sad and miserable—almost desperate—thoughts as you came in."

Miss Amy laid her little hand on the revolver.

"Oh, don't!" she said earnestly, the tears still in her eyes. "It's not right. I wish I knew what to say. But it's not right. There's a God, you know, who sees everything. You wouldn't want to disappoint Him."

She spoke as if to one of her little Sunday-school boys.

"Oh, I'm not tempted in that way," he reassured her. "The pistol belongs to my future scheme of existence. Tomorrow I start for South America. I've had a position as a civil engineer offered me, and now that I haven't any family I'm going to do some of those big things that a man always dreams about, and see a

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