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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ ROMANCE

Amber's Ambitions

Janice I. Meissner
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Like many young people, Amber Breddgeforth has an ambitious goal: earn a graduate degree in business and pursue a fulfilling career. She hasn't considered the possibility of being swept off her feet by a handsome, successful businessman. In *Amber's Ambitions*, Janice Meissner outlines the challenges faced by Amber and her husband, Armand Rambulet, as they grow together and combine their professional ambitions with marriage and family.

Meissner identifies the issues faced by many young couples. Amber is just starting graduate business school when she meets Armand. Together, they juggle time together, Amber's study needs, and Armand's work schedule in another city. Once married, the couple continues to grow together as they face the typical challenges: poor communication, living arrangements, jealousy, money management, the decision to have children, sexual needs and desires, and family relationships. As the years go by, Amber and Armand learn more about each other and get to know and understand others in their extended family.

This is the author's second romance novel. It is set primarily in New Mexico, and the young couple's trips exploring the Land of Enchantment offer an interesting background.

While the author's idea of writing a love story with two main characters needing to meld their ambitions and desires is a good one, her efforts fail to create a book that is an interesting, enrapturing read. At times, it gets bogged down in details about Amber's clothing, building and decorating the couple's new house, and holiday gatherings and other parties. While such details add color and background to the story, they don't move the plot along. At other times, the author doesn't provide enough detail. There is little explanation about Armand's family business. Some characters are never developed. Emotional reactions are not fully explored. Incidents that could have been explored more, such as Amber's serious car accident, are dropped. Furthermore, the dialogue is stilted and unnatural. When Amber is short-tempered with her mother, Armand explains that they were both "assiduously persevering" at work, rather than simply saying they were both working hard. The love scenes in the book probably won't excite or interest many readers.

There are also confusing story lines that detract from the plot. One involves Armand's grandmother and his uncle's widow trying to decide where to live and how they can contribute to a family endowment. The extended family prays to a "Great Energy," but an explanation of this concept is not forthcoming. Political views of the characters are brought up late in the book with no background or greater development.

There are a few instances in which copy editing would have eliminated errors such as the repetition of details of the couple's visit to Chamizal National Monument and a Labor Day visit from Amber's parents (they come and go twice).

Meissner appears to understand marriage, love, and the challenges ambitious people face in maintaining relationships, but she fails to deliver a compelling story.

MARY CARY CRAWFORD (September 13, 2012)

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