



The Joy of Living

by Sidney Gowling

(Continued from last week)

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—Disliking the prospect of a month's visit to her austere aunt, Lady Erythea, Alexander Lamb, Almee, vicariously daughter of the Very Reverend Viscount Scroope, is in a rebellious mood.

CHAPTER II—She wanders into the park, encountering a strange youth in trouble with a motorcycle. He laughingly introduces himself as "Billy," American. The two cement the acquaintance by a ride on the motorcycle, the "Flying Sphinx," and part. With Georgina Berners, her cousin, Almee sets out for Jervaulx. On the way she decides that Georgina shall impersonate her at Jervaulx, while she goes on a holiday. Georgina's horrified protest is unavailing.

CHAPTER III—Happy in her new freedom, Almee again meets "Billy." He tells her his name is Spencer, and she gives her name as Amy Snooks, at present "out of a job." Billy offers to take her into partnership in selling the Sphinx. In a spirit of madcap adventure, she accepts. The two proceed to the town of Stanhoe, taking separate lodgings in Ivy Cottage.

CHAPTER IV—That night Almee visits Georgina and learns that the deception has not been discovered. By her dominant personality she compels Georgina to continue the subterfuge.

CHAPTER V—On a trial spin next day on the Sphinx, with Billy, Almee almost collides with a carriage in which are her aunt, Georgina and Alexander. The pair escape unrecognized.

CHAPTER VI—Georgina learns that Lord Scroope is coming to visit Lady Erythea and, realizing what will happen on his arrival, is in hopeless bewilderment.

CHAPTER VII—While Almee is secretly visiting Georgina at Jervaulx, the place is burglarized. Almee escapes.

CHAPTER VIII—Georgina learns, with much relief, that Almee has got away.

CHAPTER IX—Police Inspector Panke decides that the robbery is the work of "Jack the Climber" and "Clammy Kate," noted thieves, who travel on a motorcycle.

CHAPTER X—Billy, aware of his "partner's" nocturnal jaunts, is troubled. He follows her, on the Sphinx, to Jervaulx. He hears the commotion at once suspects burglary, and follows two figures on a motorcycle who are apparently in a desperate hurry. Cornering the pair, Billy snatches a man who attempts to shoot him, picking up a package the fellow had dropped. He discovers the other fugitive to be a woman. Stopping to aid her, she strikes him with a stone, rendering him unconscious, and the pair escape.

CHAPTER XI—Recovering, Billy discovers the package he had picked up is a jewel case, containing emeralds. Realizing they must be part of the loot from Jervaulx, he starts for the abbey. On the way he meets Almee, with the police in pursuit. In a secure hiding place, a cave among the crag pits, Almee tells him the whole story. He urges that she make a frank confession to her father, but on reflection both realize Almee's good name has been compromised by her two night's stay at Ivy Cottage.

CHAPTER XII—Assuring Almee he has a plan to save her, Billy leaves her in the cave and, proceeding to Jervaulx, restores the emeralds to the astounded Lady Erythea.

CHAPTER XIII—Rejecting any reward, after explaining how the emeralds came into his possession, Billy accepts the position of chauffeur to Lady Erythea, seeing in the situation a promise of a way out of the embroglio.

Billy turned over the necklace and pointed to the little gold-enamel pendant.



"A Severe Cut," said the Inspector, impressed.

sat that bore the Lamb arms in a lozenge.

"Those three sheepskins—" he began.

"Fleeces—fleeces, argent," murmured Mr. Lamb.

"—are the same brand as those on the shields over the lodge gates here, which I noticed as I came by. And the thieves were coming from this direction when I struck them."

"Mr. Spencer, not being a policeman, uses his common sense," interposed Lady Erythea with extreme acidity. "Are you suggesting that he stole emeralds worth a fortune, for the pleasure of returning them with thanks—besides wounding himself on the head?"

Mr. Panke beaved a heavy sigh.

"No, my lady, I am endeavoring to

collect facts that may help in the tracing of the thieves." The Inspector ran through his notes, detailing the information Billy had given him during the first part of the story. "Full name, William Spencer, on your way from Beechwell to Stanhoe railway station, intending to catch the 2:15 a. m. mail train to London, when you encountered the thieves about 1:30 a. m. Is that correct?"

"Precisely," said Billy, annealing the statements into his memory. It would not do to forget any of them. The thought of the work he was giving the Recording Angel caused him not a tremor. He was thinking only of Almee, hiding in her cave behind the bramble bush. "Do you want me to come to the station house?"

"Not necessary," said the Inspector, after a moment's hesitation, "but I want to know where you can be found immediately in case anything further transpires—and your testimony will be wanted if we apprehend the thieves." He avoided Lady Erythea's eye.

"Overseas club, London, will find me. I've quarters there."

The Inspector made a note.

"What is your occupation?"

"Motor engineer."

"Engineer?" queried the Inspector, glancing at his hands.

"Well, say motor mechanic," said Billy grinning, "and proud of it."

"Are you employed with any firm?"

"I am on my own at present."

Inspector Panke closed his notebook with a snap.

"I must return to my duties, your ladyship. I congratulate you on recovering the emeralds." He bowed gloomily to Mr. Lamb and darted at Billy a parting glance that said: "Young man, however little you desire to see me again, I shall find you when I want you. I am Inspector Panke."

The door closed behind him.

"It is a pleasure," said Lady Erythea grimly, "to reduce the self-esteem of that very fatuous person."

She turned to Billy with increased interest. "You are, it seems, a motor mechanic. And out of employment. Would you care for a situation as chauffeur? I can offer you," said Lady Erythea, "four pounds a week, and all found."

Billy was submerged by two waves of emotion. The first was a strangled desire for laughter. The second, an instant determination to clutch at the offer, with its amazing possibilities and advantages that opened before him. Thought was a very fluid thing with Billy.

"Done!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Alexander Lamb coughed.

"Say, yes, my lady," he murmured.

"Yes, my lady!" announced Billy, into the ear-trumpet.

"Very good," said Lady Erythea with satisfaction. "I engage you. I must warn you," she added with sudden caution, "that I had to discharge my last chauffeur for dishonesty—an offense that in your case is still more revolting—and also for one still more revolting: I found him philandering most indecorously with one of my maid-servants." She fixed Billy with her eye. "I trust you have no such propensity as that."

"I should," said Billy indignantly, "as soon think of drinking a gallon of petrol."

"Precisely," said Lady Erythea with approval. "Then I should like you to enter upon your duties today. Say this afternoon. There are quarters for you over the garage, and the uniforms of the man I discharged. You will only be required to go out once this evening. At five-thirty—" Lady Erythea checked herself. "But I forgot. You will require a day or two's rest. You have had a strenuous night, your head is injured."

"That doesn't amount to a skeeter-bite, my lady," said Billy quickly. "My head's all right. I can be ready by this afternoon."

"Very well, if you are sure. It will be convenient. My coachman is away for the day. I believe the two motors are in order. Take the smaller one, the Panhard luggage-car, and meet the 5:30 train at Stanhoe. There will be a young woman on the train. She is coming here as parlor maid. Bring her and her boxes. You understand?"

"Sure—very good, my lady," said Billy. "What's her name?"

"The name is immaterial. She is for Jervaulx. It is curious," added Lady Erythea impatiently, "how my memory fails me. I forget the woman's name. Alexander, you remember I spoke to you of this matter? The girl from Scroope, that I engaged on the recommendation of your uncle—she was in his service. The daughter of one of his keepers—Lord Scroope gave her an exemplary character, she is coming on a fortnight's trial."

"Snooks was the name you told me," said Mr. Lamb.

"To be sure. The young person's name is Snooks," said Lady Erythea to Billy. "That will preclude all possibility of mistake. I regret, Spencer, that you would not allow me to recompense you, but I have no doubt that I have acquired an excellent chauffeur. And now—you will be glad of a bath and a meal."

She rang for the butler, and gave him an order. Mr. Tarbeaux and Billy departed in each other's company.

Alexander Lamb breathed heavily.

"My dear aunt," he said, "you are a law unto yourself, and I have known you do some remarkable things. But is it wise to engage as servant a man of whom you know nothing, without character or references?"

"Alexander," said his aunt, "you almost betray imbecility. What better references could I have than the restoration of the Lamb emeralds and the refusal of a reward, when the man could have made a fortune for himself without any risk of detection?"

Mr. Lamb was dumb.

"That abominable creature Borsali," said Lady Erythea, "had unexceptionable references, and was chauffeur eighteen months to the bishop of Litchester. You know what his record was here."

She turned upon Alexander.

"Do you, a shepherd of men, pretend to say that you think that young man anything but absolutely honest?"

"I observed him, and I am certain he is honest," said Alexander after a pause. "But—er—his manner is very peculiar."

"We must make allowances," proclaimed Lady Erythea, "for the independence of the American. In theory I have always believed it detestable. Actually I find it not unattractive."

CHAPTER XIV

The New Parlor Maid.

Almee, sitting in the morning sunlight near the mouth of her burrow, heard a rustling among the bushes and at once dived back into shelter. Presently there was a soft whistle, which she answered. Mr. William Spencer parted the brambles very quietly and entered the cave.

"Billy!"

He clicked his heels together and touched his cap.

"Anything I can do for you, miss?" he said grinning. "Got a new job. Chauffeur to her ladyship. Four a week and all found."

"What?"

Billy sat down beside her and made his report. Almee heard it, at first, with the air of Desdemona listening to Othello. Then she rolled on the sand in helpless spasms of laughter.

"How absolutely gorgeous!" she panted, sitting up and wiping her eyes. "You've done splendidly. I wish I'd been there to hear you bluff the fat policeman. But—what's the good of the chauffeur's job, Billy? That will hamper you."

"Not a bit! It's great. I just jumped at it. You see, I've got a sure berth now, right close here, where I want to be. I'm your aunt's man. And she's some old girl, too—she isn't taking anything from anyone. You should have heard her handing it to the policeman. I'm solid—so far. And," added Billy, gleefully, "I've two automobiles in my charge. Not bad ones either. We can't use the Sphinx. But, if we want to shift you quick an' lively, you've the call on those two cars."

"I never thought of that! You're right, Billy."

"Of course there's danger still. It wasn't any good my giving a false name. That would have been fatal in the end. But there's the trouble that they knew me as Spencer, in Stanhoe. I'm going off right now to try an' put that straight," said Billy. "I can see a light. Yes, I believe I can get away with it. That inspector will be a nuisance. I'm afraid. But he's a fool, anyway."

Almee looked at him admiringly.

"What a lot of whoppers you must have told, Billy. Did you mind?"

Billy put a twig between his white teeth and bit it in half thoughtfully.

"Where I come from, we hate a liar," he said. "But there's just one time when a man can lie, an' it's up to him to do it. Mind? I—enjoyed it."

"But I don't see how you can do it so well, if you've had no practice."

"It's wonderful how you fall into it, when there's something worth doin' it for," said Billy simply. "Well, I must get busy. I've got till the evening, when I fetch a hired girl from the station. She's from down your way. Name," he added, grinning, "of Snooks. What'd you think of that, partner?"

"What?" cried Almee. "It must be Amy Snooks—daughter of Dad's second keeper, who was killed in the war. I know her as well as I know—myself. I gave you her name when you asked me mine—it was the first I could think of. You say Aunt has engaged her?"

"Yes. On your father's recommendation."

"How beastly awkward! Directly she sees Georgie the game's up!"

"That's rotten," said Billy seriously; "we've got enough on our hands as it is. If she wasn't a woman, I'd spill the car and put her out of action for quite awhile, so she couldn't give you away. As it is, seems to me the only thing is for me to get hold of your cousin Georgina an' show her how to keep the Snooks girl quiet. I think it can be done, if Georgina has any sense."

"Yes, that might do. I don't think we need worry much about Amy Snooks, after all. I wish I could get a word with Amy myself. She'd do any blessed thing I told her—even if it was to throw herself into a furnace. I can manage Amy. You'll just have

to do your best, though. But look here, Billy," said Almee earnestly, "you haven't told me yet how you're going to pull me out of it all. It's getting a worse tangle every hour. What's the plan?"

"I'll be back here about seven this evening," said Billy seriously, "and by then I'll bring you good news—you trust me. Gee! why didn't you remind me?" he exclaimed with self-reproach, dragging a paper parcel from his pocket; "you must be starving."

"I had some chocolate from the Sphinx's pannier."

"Well, try this," Billy exposed some rashers of bacon between slices of bread, and a lukewarm sausage. "I wish it was something better. They gave me a meal at the abbey, and I plucked these for you. And here's your blue dust-cloak from Ivy Cottage. Put that on. It'll cover the tear in your dress, in case anyone came across you. I'll try an' raise a new skirt for you. An' now I've got to slide out and get to work."

He rose quickly, and was gone before she could say a word. Almee went to the cave's mouth and watched him out of sight.

"I wonder what he'll do," she said to herself. She reflected on the situation. The difficulty concerning Amy Snooks, the new parlor maid, was uppermost in her mind.

A flash came into Almee's eyes; it announced the birth of a brilliant idea. She laughed impulsively, and then sighed.

"Can't be worked, I'm afraid," she murmured. "Too far away, and

there isn't time. But what a pity! I—"

Suddenly Almee started to her feet in sheer panic.

"Oh, great heavens, what an idiot I am! Dad! I quite forgot—!"

The stress of the past ten hours had utterly driven from her mind one vital fact that now came back poignantly. Lord Scroope was coming to Jervaulx at 5 p. m. Georgina had said so. The burglary, intervening, swamped all memory of it. But, after all, Lord Scroope's arrival would be worse than the burglary.

"It absolutely tears everything!" said Almee desperately. "What am I to do? If only I'd told Billy! But even he wouldn't be able to do anything here."

She paced the floor of the cave. The bottom had dropped out of the entire scheme of things. Then her face lit up with a gleam of hope, and she stopped short, thinking swiftly.

"There might be time. It's frightfully risky. But if I don't try it I'm done for."

She buttoned up the dust-cloak with nimble fingers.

"As well be hung for a sheep as a lamb," said Almee.

She left the cave, ran up to the crest of the cragpit, and looked round cautiously. Then she picked up the skirts of the dust-cloak and scudded across the common like a hare.

The Panhard luggage-car from Jervaulx wound its way through the lanes, with Mr. William Spencer at the steering-wheel, clad in a dark green uniform overcoat with brass buttons. The time was 5:15 p. m.

The Panhard was running badly. In spite of Billy's overhaul, two of the cylinders misfired; presently the car stopped with a cough and splutter. Billy, using blood-curdling language anent the prodigal Mr. Borsali, late chauffeur of Jervaulx abbey, got down and opened the bonnet. It took him several minutes to start the Panhard again, and when finally he arrived at Stanhoe railway station, the train from Burnt Ash was alongside the platform.

A painfully obvious policeman in plain clothes was lounging in the station approach. He did not waste a second glance on Billy; the driver of the Jervaulx abbey car had no interest for him. Billy, anxious to pick up his passenger, the disastrous parlor maid, hurried onto the platform.

He sighted his quarry at once. A young woman in a cheap black tight-fitting coat was standing by the luggage-van. Baggage checks are unknown in England. A tin trunk was buried out of the van by a blind, invisible force, and Billy, approaching the passenger, raised his peaked cap politely.

"Are you for Jervaulx abbey?" he asked.

The young woman turned round.

"I'm the new parlor maid," she said primly in broad Eastshire dialect. "You might carry my box for me, if that ain't too heavy."

Billy's head swam. His fingers opened, and feebly closed again. His eyes bulged.

It was Almee. Almee in a black coat over a print dress, and sensible boots. Her bronze hair was drawn straight back and plaited into a respectable knob, her eyes were preternaturally solemn.

They passed out. Billy took his place at the wheel, Almee seated herself beside him.

"I'll sit here," she said serenely, "and you can tell me about the place as we go. What's it like? They say her ladyship is something chronic."

Billy glanced at her dazedly, and let in the clutch. The transit of Stanhoe was made at something over the speed limit. When clear of the town, Billy gave the coughing Panhard a full throttle and roared along the Jervaulx road. He did not look at Almee, who was staring straight in front of her. Billy switched the car down a narrow lane, covered by overhanging trees, and stopped the engine. He turned to face Almee.

"Partner," he said, "what in thunder does this mean?"

Almee looked at him, and dissolved into spasms of laughter.

"What do you think of it, Billy?" she said. "Aren't I the complete Amy Snooks?"

"It don't go!" said Billy, almost fiercely. "Let me in on this. What have you been doing?"

"When you left me this morning, I remembered something positively awful. Dad was coming here this afternoon—at five o'clock."

Billy whistled with dismay.

"The police business had driven it right out of my head. And I couldn't consult you. I thought the only thing was to get to Scroope Towers and try to put it right. I knew there

was a train about ten at Stanhoe, and I started for the station. But I never got there."

"Thank the powers you didn't!" said Billy fervently. "All the stations are watched. You'd never have passed through alone without getting pulled by the cops."

"Well, the train wasn't necessary. A car overtook me on the road—driven by a young man. He pulled up and offered me a lift."

"Oh!" said Billy.

"He was quite a good sort. Inclined to be a bit sentimental; but it was a fast car, and he was rather new to driving. What's the matter with you?"

There was an expression on Billy's face that she had not seen there before. He was looking sour.

"Get on with the song and dance," he said shortly.

"Well, I was dropped near Scroope, and I got across to the Towers; creeping about like a Red Indian, so nobody saw me. I had a look in through the morning room window and saw Dad reading his letters. I had a mind to go in and kiss him, but, of course, that wouldn't do. He was looking pleased—I think he was reading Aunt Erythea's letter approving of me. Of course he hadn't heard about the burglary. There's no telephone at Scroope—Dad won't have one."

"Then I stalked the garage, where old Grundle, our shover, had got the head off one of the tylners, and I heard him grumbling to the gardener about having to drive Dad to Jervaulx and back the same evening. I hid in the laurels till Grundle went to his dinner, and then I attended to the car—especially the magneto. I did it artistically. You can take it from me, the old 'bus will never leave Scroope today. Dad's visit is a washout. He's

(Continued on Page Five)

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