



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 Erythra, Lambe, at Jervaulx, Almee, her cousin, Alexander Lambe, Almee, vicious daughter of the Very Reverend Vicar of Scroope, is in a rebellious mood.

CHAPTER II.—She wanders into the park, there 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 motor-cycle, 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.—Almee, in her new freedom, Almee again meets "Billy." He tells her his name is Spencer, and she gives her name as Amy Spook, 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 village of Stanthorpe, 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 Erythra 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 "Calamity Kate," noted thieves, who travel on a motorcycle.

CHAPTER X.—Billy, aware of his "partner's" nocturnal habits, 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 knocks out 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 pines, 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 Erythra.

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

CHAPTER XIV.—Realizing what her father's visit to Jervaulx would mean, Almee goes secretly to her home, disables the family auto, thus preventing his journey, and induces a parlormaid to let her take her place at Jervaulx.

CHAPTER XV.—Alexander recognizes Almee as the woman on the motorcycle which ran into the Lambe carriage, denouncing her as "Calamity Kate." Georgina divulges Almee's identity. Hearing her story, Alexander consents to keep the secret.

"Almee," he said sharply, "go out—go out quickly! I will deal with her." "What are you going to do?" gasped Georgina. Instead of obeying him she came forward, trembling.

"Go out! I am going to give this woman in charge!"

"In pity's name, don't do that!" Georgina gulped, and struggled for



Almee Flourished the Feather Brush in His Face.

breath. "She—she is your kiki-kiki Cousin Almee!" Georgina dropped into a chair and began to cry. Alexander, taking his hand from the bell, wondered if she had suddenly become insane.

"Quite right," said Almee. With the calm of despair she planted herself in front of him, her eyes defiant. "I am your kiki-kiki Cousin Almee. And that's my cousin, Georgina Berners. I made her take my place here, because I thought it would be dull, and Dad insisted on my coming. So now call the police, Cousin Almee, and let's get it over."

It seemed to Alexander that he had suddenly been transported into Bedlam. He stared from Almee to the gently sobbing Georgina. And then, as the door began to open, Mr. Lambe turned swiftly and caught the handle, preventing the intruder from entering. "Did you ring, miss?" inquired Mr. Tarbeux's voice.

"A mistake," said Alexander, quickly. "I will ring if I want you." He closed the door, and peered searchingly at Almee.

"I do not understand what this means," he said coldly, "but it does not seem an occasion for the intrusion of servants. We are alone. Will you explain?"

Almee felt a sudden relief; a twinge almost of gratitude. She had not expected Alexander to do anything so sensible.

"I'll make it clear if I can," she said, and, looking Alexander in the face with an angelically simple expression, she told him the tale from the beginning, briefly, yet comprehensively. As she was speaking, Almee watched Mr. Lambe's face. The waves of emotion that passed over his usually serene features made them interesting, suggesting some delicate instrument subjected to shocks for which it had never been designed. At the end he was gasping faintly, like a stranded but still dignified fish.

"And so," concluded Almee, "you see it's a piece of my skirt the police have got. And it was I who tripped you up the stairs. I'm sorry—Cousin."

Mr. Lambe passed a somewhat unsteady hand across his forehead. He looked at Almee, and then turned slowly to Georgina.

"Miss Berners—" he said. Georgina's answer was a sob. Immediately Almee stepped across, raised her from her chair and, with an arm round her waist, faced Alexander.

"Stop! Not a word from you to Georgina!" she said defiantly. "There's no one to blame but me. Everything she's done, I made her do. She wanted me to own up. All this, she's done to try and save me. Georgie's the best thing that ever happened."

Alexander looked at Almee. "My dear child," he said gently, "I have only one wish and that is to help you."

Almee's lips parted; she stared at him incredulously. She saw the most human sympathy in the clean-shaven, priestly face; the kindest light in his large eyes.

"Miss Berners," said Alexander, still more gently, "will you leave me with your cousin? I should like to speak to her alone. I will see you presently, if you will give me an opportunity."

Georgina nodded brokenly, and moved to the window. "Georgie," whispered Almee quickly, as she passed, "meet me by the little arbor down the gardens in half an hour—it won't be safe here—after this."

Almee and Alexander were left together, facing each other. There was an embarrassed pause.

"Tell me, Cousin," said Alexander, quietly, "why have you done this mad thing?"

"Well," said Almee, for once at a loss, "I—see—I was afraid of you, Alexander." She glanced up at him almost shyly. "I didn't want to come to Jervaulx. I thought it would suit Georgie much better than me."

Alexander's firm lips twitched very slightly.

"I got fed up at home," continued Almee, desperately. "Everybody was so solemn. They drove me to it! I just did it on the impulse. And then I—things sort of happened—I—"

She made an impatient, hopeless gesture with her hands. "Oh, what's the use of talking about it? It's done, and here I am in this wretched mess. Police after me, and—everything! You've found me out—you can give me away. What are you going to do?"

"There is only one thing to do," said Alexander. "Make a clean breast of it."

Almee's lips tightened. "Come with me to Aunt Erythra," said Mr. Lambe soothingly. "I will accompany you. I'll do everything I can for you. There is no other way. For I can see," he said, "that you have courage."

"No," said Almee decisively, "it is impossible." Alexander's eyes became keener. He looked a little contemptuous.

"Are you afraid?" he said. "Do you not see that you must face the consequences of this foolish thing you have done? Once the truth is told, you have nothing to fear from the police."

"The police!" said Almee scornfully. "I'm not afraid of the police. I'm not much afraid of Aunt Erythra. It isn't that at all. It's—the other thing."

"What other thing?" Almee looked at him with growing embarrassment. "Oh!" she said at last, desperately, "have I got to put it in so many words? My staying at Ivy Cottage! Didn't you understand what I told you? I was there—two nights."

Mr. Lambe, to her surprise, did not look forbidding or censorious. Instead, he looked a little puzzled. And in that moment Almee conceived a liking for Alexander.

"Now that I have seen you, and heard your story," he said, "I attach no importance to that incident, whatever."

"Ah," said Almee sadly, "but other people will, you see." Alexander suddenly flushed crimson, and he avoided Almee's eye. But his face grew peculiarly grim.

"I have only this to say. That man—that Spencer—who dared to expose you to such a situation, is the culprit I wish to see. He deserves—"

Almee's heel smote the floor. "Not a word against Billy! It's he who saved me, right from the beginning. He begged me to let him own up. But he has kept my secret, at his own risk, because I wanted it kept. He is a gentleman!"

Alexander winced. At that moment, out of the tail of her eye, Almee caught sight of a tall figure in overalls crossing the gravel-walk beyond the lawn.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Almee. "Let him answer for himself, if you want to see him."

She ran to the window and called recklessly: "Billy!"

Mr. William Spencer looked towards her, glanced quickly left and right to see if the coast was clear, and hurried to join Almee. He stepped in through the window.

"Billy," said Almee, "this is my Cousin Alexander. And he's—he knows all about it. It seems this is our finish, Billy."

The two men turned and faced each other.

CHAPTER XVI

"They Must Be Told."

Mr. Lambe's serious eyes had become hard and penetrating as a pair of crystal lenses. They gave the impression of piercing the exterior of the man before him, and reading his mind. Alexander looked, at that moment, rather like an inquisitor of Torquemada's court.

"You are Mr. William Spencer?" said Alexander jellily.

"That's so. You don't know me? I guessed you wouldn't. But I remember you very well, though I never connected your name till now," said Billy calmly. "You were chaplain to the Tenth Rutlands, in 1918. Came from China to join 'em, I heard."

Mr. Lambe was silent.

"I was a sub in the Ninety-seventh of the line, lying next the British Seventeenth division at Arras," added Billy. "I remember you because you brought in six wounded who got left after the raid on the pillboxes. Two of them were ours. You got the military brass."

Almee stared at Alexander in blank amazement.

"That will do," interrupted Mr. Lambe impatiently. "We are not dealing with the war. Do you realize," he said in his grimmest tone, "the position in which you have placed this lady?"

Billy looked straight at him. "You are Miss Scroope's cousin," he said quietly, "and a parson. I guess I'll take lying down, from you. Any thing you choose to say or do. Of course I realize it, and it's why I'm here. I've been a fool. I didn't seem to know. But I ought to have known."

He sighed. "Things are so different, where I belong. An' they were different in France—mighty different. But that's no excuse. I wish I'd broken my neck before I did such a fool thing. And here we are in the soup. I don't matter. And you don't matter either, parson. All that matters is Miss Scroope. Get me?"

"Come here," said Alexander. He took Billy by the arm, led him to the window, and turned him so that the sun shone full on his face. Mr. Lambe looked at Billy for some moments in silence, with a peculiar interest.

"Mr. Spencer," said Alexander, releasing him, "I will see you presently. I shall have something to say to you. For the moment, leave me with my cousin. And—go quickly!"

Billy nodded. He turned to Almee with a smile.

"Don't you worry," he said quietly, "the padre's white."

Billy disappeared with extreme suddenness through the window. Alexander came slowly up to Almee.

"That young man," he said, "has the heart of a child. It is a good thing to have. And rare, at his age. That does not alter the fact that your situation is dangerous, and even terrible. My decision is final," he said earnestly. "There is but one thing to do. The plain, honest course. Aunt Erythra must be told immediately. Then you will be safe."

"And I repeat it's impossible," returned Almee quickly. "Can't you see? You understand. And Georgie under-

stands. But there is one who will

never understand. My father. He doesn't belong to our time. He'll consider only one thing—that his daughter has been disgraced before all the county. Her name a by-word among the rabble. That's how he'll take it. It will simply be Dad's finish."

Almee shifted miserably. "I never thought about it. But Georgie told me what it would mean to my father. And she's right. You don't know Dad."

Alexander had turned rather white. He walked to the door and back, in some agitation.

"It is some years since I have seen your father. But I knew him very well. And I believe you are right. This would be a heavy blow to him. But—how has he got to be faced?"

"And I will not let Dad face it!" said Almee fiercely. "I don't care, for myself. But I'm not going to have him made miserable—for all the parsons in the country!"

"You have no choice. You do not suppose for a moment this thing can be concealed and overcome!"

Almee turned to him with supreme confidence. "Of course I do. Billy will see it through!" she said triumphantly.

Alexander gasped. "I cannot countenance deceit. The whole thing is known to me—my position is impossible," he said. "I should be abetting a lie."

"There's no need for you to do anything at all. Nobody wanted you to butt in, Alexander. The secret is mine, not yours. Go to Aunt Erythra, if you must!" said Almee bitterly. "Oh, I'm not complaining—I can see that you must. Only you'll do it without my sanction. Go to her, and tell her all you know about me."

Alexander groaned. For awhile he was silent. The perspiration stood out on his forehead. The anguish in his face was so plain that even Almee felt compunction.

Alexander sighed aloud. "I shall keep silence," he said. "It is impossible for me to betray a woman's secret without her consent—or to utter one word that may affect her reputation. But what will come of it—"

"Ah!" said Almee eagerly, "you need know nothing at all. Whatever happens, I'll keep you out of it."

"On the contrary! I implore you, whatever difficulty arises, to come to



Almee Seized His Hands in Hers.

me. I—I will do all I can." He gulped.

"I want to help you, Almee."

Almee seized his hands in hers.

"Alexander," she cried breathlessly, "I am sorry I knocked you down!"

The next moment she had fled through the window.

Half an hour later Almee, a somewhat furtive figure, was dodging to and fro on the path near the little arbor in the rose garden, keeping an anxious eye on all the approaches from the house. She was still feeling a little confused.

"Who would ever have dreamed he was such a good sort as that?" she said to herself. "It's a delicious sort of mess I've got them both into. I hope he won't jump on poor Georgie. Why on earth doesn't she hurry up? There she is—oh bother!—Alexander again!"

Almee retreated out of sight into the arbor.

Georgina came slowly along the path, her countenance pale and downcast, like a recalcitrant novice who fears the Lady Superior. Mr. Alexander Lambe, loitering through the forest of standard roses, quickly overtook her.

"Miss Berners!"

Georgina turned to him with frightened eyes.

"I wish to speak with you," said Alexander with suppressed agitation. "Shall we be seated?" He led her to a rustic seat close against the arbor.

"It distresses me," said Mr. Lambe earnestly, "to see, as I cannot help seeing, the effect this has had upon you. The shock to your sensibility. Let me set your mind at rest, as far as I can. I hardly dare to think how it will all end. But your cousin is as innocent as an infant of any real intent to deceive. She has behaved as inconsequently as a child—that is all. One—one must try to make allowances for her. She should be still at school. That is what I think of her."

"Yes," murmured Georgina miserably, "but what must you think of me?"

"Of you?" said Mr. Lambe with strong feeling. "Your loyalty—your unflinching attachment to that young

madcap, stirs my admiration. It is dreadful to think of what you must have suffered. Purely to protect Almee. You faced my aunt." Mr. Lambe clasped his hand and drew his breath in sharply. "Yes, you faced the displeasure of my aunt! And—of course, the police. For days this sword of Damocles has been hanging over your blameless head. You—you have not been guilty of deceit. No, no! Only of silence. I think you have behaved, on the whole, admirably."

"Oh!" gasped Georgina faintly, hardly daring to believe her ears, "you cannot mean it!"

"I do mean it!" exclaimed Mr. Lambe warmly. "Miss Berners, from the first hour I saw you, I was convinced of your—your essential goodness! It betrays itself in all that you do. Anything that is unbecoming or questionable, glides away from you—"

proclaimed Mr. Lambe, with a sweeping movement of his hand, "as the turbid stream flows over the riverbed of white marble, leaving its purity unscathed. My admiration for you is greater, if that is possible, than ever."

Georgina's heart fluttered delightfully.

"I think," continued Alexander, with growing enthusiasm, "that you exist to sacrifice yourself for others, Miss Berners. You have more than piety—you have charity. It is one of the sweetest qualities in a woman."

Georgina turned to him with swimming eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Lambe!" she murmured with delicious confusion.

Alexander answered her with a hollow groan. She was startled at the sudden distress in his face.

"The question is not what I think of you," he said bitterly, "but what you think of me! You know the principles I profess, and that I impressed on you. Out of my own mouth I am condemned. How can you feel anything but contempt for me! I have consented to connive at this mad escapade of Almee's and all its consequences. To keep silent. To—to bolster it up," he said with a gulp. "I have passed my word."

Georgina's eyes shone.

"You have done that!" she cried eagerly. "Why, now that you are on her side, she may be saved from exposure after all! I think it is splendid of you—absolutely splendid!"

"How can you think of me, but as a hypocrite? You do not mean, Miss Berners, that you feel any respect for me now?"

"Mr. Lambe, when I first knew you, I thought you my ideal as a churchman. I think so more than ever. When I was in trouble, and consulted you, I seemed to find you a little hard. Poor Almee had enough to bear. But now," gasped Georgina, quite carried away, "I consider your conduct noble—really noble! I admire you more than ever."

"Miss Berners," said Alexander, husky with emotion, "if only you knew what a relief it is, that I have not forgotten your regard! I have only known you a few days, but your kindness, your sympathy—"

his hand closed almost convulsively on hers—"Miss Berners, may I call you Almee—I mean Georgina—?"

"Poo!"

A stifled, explosive sound caused Mr. Lambe to start violently and look round him.

"What was that? A dog?" he said confusedly.

Georgina, pink to the ears, had risen to her feet; her eyes shone somewhat viciously.

"It sounded to me more like a cat!" she said in acid tones, and walked away down the path.

Mr. Lambe followed her.

When they were out of sight, the parlor maid emerged from the little arbor, her face crimson, her shoulders shaking, a handkerchief pressed to her streaming eyes.

"Poor old Georgie!" she gasped. "I couldn't help it. I should have burst in another minute."

She squeezed the handkerchief and controlled her emotion.

"They'll have a jolly old tangle to unpack, too, when Aunt knows!" she said thoughtfully.

"No use stopping here. I suppose I'd better finish my darning."

Almee made a circuitous journey to the deserted drawing room, and dusted with the energy of a high-power machine. The room was not much the better for it. She was only just in time, for the housekeeper appeared, and after some sour comments, stood by her while she did a good deal of the work over again. Then Almee was marshaled into the library, to dust that.

The library overlooked the path leading to the garage. It was some forty minutes later that Almee caught sight of the chauffeur approaching. She flung down her duster and ran to the window, giving a cautious whistle, as a poacher who calls his dog.

Billy made sure that the coast was clear, and came to her window. He looked at her and laughed joyously.

"The clouds have rolled by, partner!" he said.

"What has happened? Have you seen Alexander?"

"Sure. Just had a pow-wow with him in the garage."

"What did he say to you?" asked Almee quickly.

Billy eyed her thoughtfully. "Never you mind. The game's square. The padre's all wool and a yard wide. You're all right now. Unless—"

"But the police! Suppose they trace us and come back here?"

"They may not. I believe I see a way through it. And I've all the time

of this evening. You sit tight!"

"But if they come here?"

"Then they'll get me," said Billy, "but they won't get you; you're safe from the cops, anyhow. I promise you that."

Almee leaned out of the window, with flushed cheeks, and caught his hands in hers.

"Billy," she said breathlessly, "how good you've been to me. How good you've been! I want—"

"I'd be flayed alive for you!" said Billy suddenly. "There isn't anything I wouldn't do—and I've done nothing, yet. You've got the grit of twenty." He held her hands tight in his.

"Almee—"

"Oh! Look out!" exclaimed Almee, darning back. There was a heavy step on the gravel and Mr. Tarbeux came round the corner. Billy walked briskly forward.

Mr. Tarbeux bent a suspicious and accusing eye upon him.

CHAPTER XVII

Complications.

"Either you are working too hard, Alexander," said Lady Erythra, inspecting her nephew through her lorgnette, as they rose from the luncheon table, "or the burglary has been a greater shock to your nerves than I should have suspected. I do not like to see you wearing that pallid and constrained expression. Your sister will be quite concerned about you. She arrives, you remember, by the evening train."

"Diana!" said Mr. Lambe. "I had quite forgotten that she was due here."

Georgina started slightly, and looked perturbed.

"She is coming," said Lady Erythra, "to investigate the Jervaulx ghost. Certainly, she might have done it before. But I believe she has only recently become a member of the Psychological Research society. She is quite enthusiastic about it—so far as Diana can be enthusiastic about anything. Indeed, her letter is so technical as to be unintelligible to me."

"I did not know there was a ghost here," said Georgina, wide-eyed.

"I should not like to say that there is. But it is a tradition in the family, and has been well vouched for. I have never seen it. Diana seems to imply," added Lady Erythra a little acidly, "that only those who are advanced, and in tune with the infinite, see such things. If she thinks she is more spiritual than I, she is welcome to try. She will discover nothing whatever." Lady Erythra turned to her nephew. "Bertrand de Jussac is coming also."

"De Jussac?" cried Alexander, staring at her.

"Yes. You know him, I think."

"I have met him, of course," said Mr. Lambe dryly. "I should have thought this was the last house that so frivolous a person would wish to visit. Why is he coming? Surely he is not interested in the ghost?"

"In the ghost—no," said Lady Erythra, with a faint yet serene smile, "but possibly his interest may arise. I approve him. A young man of excellent standing and irreproachable descent."