

IT IS DIFFICULT to imagine anything more fascinating than our new serial story

The Joy of Living

By Sidney Gowing

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—Disliking the prospect of a month's visit to her austere aunt, Lady Erythea Lambé, at Jervaux abbey, and her cousin, Alexander Lambé, Almee, vicious daughter of the Very Reverend Viscount 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 motorcycle, the "Flying Sphinx," and part. With Georgina Berners, her cousin, Almee sets out for Jervaux. On the way she decides that Georgina shall impersonate her at Jervaux, 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 him 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 had 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 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 Jervaux, 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 Chimney" and "Calamity 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 Jervaux. 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 Jervaux, 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 to reflection both realize Almee's good name has been compromised by her two nights' stay at Ivy Cottage. CHAPTER XII—Assuring Almee he has a plan to save her, Billy leaves her in the cave and, proceeding to Jervaux, restores the emeralds to the astounded Lady Erythea. CHAPTER XIII—Rejecting any reward, after explaining her escapement 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. CHAPTER XIV—Realizing what her father's visit to Jervaux would mean, Almee goes secretly to her home, disguises the family auto, thus preventing his journey, and induces a parlormaid to let her take her place at Jervaux. CHAPTER XV—Alexander recognizes Almee as the woman on the motorcycle which ran into the Lambé carriage, denouncing her as "Calamity Kate." Georgina divulges Almee's identity. Hearing her story, Alexander consents to keep the secret. CHAPTER XVI—Alexander finds himself very much in love with Georgina. CHAPTER XVII—The approaching visit of Alexander's sister, Lady Diana, who, of course, knows Almee, brings consternation to the two girls. CHAPTER XVIII—Another visitor to Jervaux is the Vicomte de Jussac, Diana's suitor. Diana recognizes Almee and threatens to denounce her. CHAPTER XIX—Arms and the Man. The housekeeper looked bewildered. Diana's wrath agitated her. Almee was standing quietly in the middle of the room, her hands behind her. "I dare not disturb her ladyship now that she has retired for the night and her room is locked," said the housekeeper; "my orders are strict. May I suggest that you see her yourself, my lady? If there is anything else I can do—"

"I have no desire to listen to a discreditable story, at which, no doubt, I could give a very good guess. As for your father, he must face the consequences of having allowed you to behave as you do. I have no more to say," replied Diana with cold disdain. Almee's eyes blazed at her. "You utter beast, Di!" she said, and flung out of the room. For half an hour Almee mused upon the situation, and mentally pronounced it hopeless. The dreary bedroom became impossible to her. She opened the door; the house was in darkness; everyone, apparently, had retired. Almee made her way to Georgina's bedroom door, and rapped stealthily for some time, for the door was locked. It seemed impossible to arouse Georgina, and after a lengthy effort Almee desisted. Lady Erythea's room was next door, and even the deaf heard when they are not wanted. Finally, Almee crept down into the hall, where the suits of armor loomed grimly in the half-light, a silent, threatening host. It was impossible to get out of the house. All conceivable outlets were secured, since the burglarly. Almee passed through the paneled dining hall. The darkness got on her nerves. She switched on a single electric light, and looked round her hopelessly. "Two or three more days, and I believe Billy would have pulled me through," she said dully. "I know he would. Now, it's all up. I'm done. And I can't get to Billy." Almee dropped into an armchair, buried her face in her hands, and began to cry. She cried like a child that has hurt itself. A large figure stole into the room with a remarkably noiseless step. It was the Vicomte de Jussac. He started as he caught sight of the forlorn figure in the chair, and stared in surprise. The spectacle of a damsel in distress at once roused generous sentiments in the beau sabreur. He crossed the room and seated himself on the arm of the chair. "Away, dull care," murmured Bertrand. "Such eyes as those—I cannot see them but I am sure they are adorable—were never made for weeping. Tell me your sorrow, ma petite," he said gently; "it shall be swept away!" "I'm in awful trouble!" sobbed Almee. "Alas! But let me help you. Here am I, a big, gross fellow, but very capable, sent by the gods to aid you. It is what I am for!" Almee dropped her hands and stared at him, startled. "Are you Monsieur de Jussac?" she stammered. "Infinitely at your service, mademoiselle." Almee's eyes searched his face. It was rather closer to hers than appeared necessary, but it was undoubtedly sympathetic. "Tell me," he murmured. Almee hesitated. "Well, I will tell you. I've got to tell somebody, or I shall go mad!" said Almee with a rush. "Anyway," she said, "I'll know it tomorrow. I'm not the parlor maid. I'm Almee Scroope—Lady Erythea's niece."

"Hel!" exclaimed the Vicomte. He rose to his feet, staring at her, and twisted his mustache—a habit in moments of bewilderment. Almee plunged into her tale breathlessly. She made it brief; it was also very jumbled. But the thread managed to unravel itself. Before she finished, Bertrand turned away. His shoulders quivered and shook, the back of his neck was crimson. "You're laughing!" cried Almee accusingly. "But no!" gasped the Vicomte, choking. "It is grief. Grief and sympathy—for you—mademoiselle."

"You are laughing!" said Almee stepping in front of him. "Go on then—laugh! If you can laugh at that, you're—you're all right! Billy says—"

"What Does This Mean?" He Said Sternly. bedle remark. If you had not courage you would not be here. Who should betray you?"

"I'll do nothing of the sort," retorted Almee defiantly. "Go and speak to her yourself, if you want to. Rouse her out of bed now, and tell her all you know. I shall get it hot; I'm used to that—but there's one consolation, she'll jolly well flatten you out, too!" Again Diana hesitated. She saw herself roaring accusations into the ear-trumpet of an infuriated aunt newly aroused from slumber. "I am tired, and I do not wish for a scene at this time of night," she said, fixing Almee with a malignant eye. "On consideration, I shall leave this affair till the morning. And now—you may go."

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"Diana." Almee told him of the encounter in the bedroom. "It cannot be! She has a heart. Under that icily exquisite exterior, a warm heart beats. It must be softened." "A heart? Di? She's a—"

"Diana's found me out, and she's going to tell Aunt, first thing in the morning," said Almee, with the calm of despair. "And I've told Monsieur de Jussac. I simply had to tell somebody. And everybody will know tomorrow."

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during the night of the burglary—had certainly been made for a knight of great stature—it fitted de Jussac very well. "Magnifique!" said Bertrand. "And, who knows—it may be the very suit of my ancestor! The—"

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A piercing shriek from Diana jarred painfully on his nerves. Bertrand started and spun around. In the doorway stood the unspeakable parlor maid, capless, her bronze hair flowing over her shoulders. Wicked laughter convulsed her, her eyes shone with triumph. "Bless you, my children!" said Almee. "You've made enough row about it!"

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Wicked Laughter Convulsed Her.